

JADAVPUR JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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1990-91

Editor
Amiya Dev

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY
CALCUTTA



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JOURNAL OF
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Henry Remak's and Swapan Majumdar's papers formed part of a one-day symposium we had on 'National and Comparative Literature' in December 1987 during Professor Remak's tenure as a visiting professor in the department. But Amiya Dev's paper had no connection with that symposium. It was read at a similar seminar last year at Punjabi University, Patiala to which acknowledgements are due for its inclusion here. Acknowledgements are also due to Telugu University for the inclusion of Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta's paper; it was presented at the Comparative Literature congress they hosted in 1989. Bikash Chakravarty's paper was read at a seminar in the department under the Special Assistance programme on 'Literary Historiography in India' in 1988. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay's paper was part of a seminar on popular culture at Kalyani University in 1987. Alok Bhalla's paper is second in the series—we published an earlier paper of his on the Gothic a few numbers ago. Our readers are familiar with all above except Sibaji Bandyopadhyay and Bikash Chakravarty. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay is our colleague and Bikash Chakravarty teaches English at Visva-Bharati. Clinton B. Seely is a part familiar name; some numbers ago we published a review of his translations, in collaboration, from the Bengali Sakta poems. He has recently brought out a full-length literary biography of Jibanananda Das, the great Bengali poet after Rabindranath Tagore, *A Poet Apart*, from the University of Delaware Press.

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Price : Rs 15/ S 3.50

Publish by Bhaskar Banerjee, Registrar, Jadavpur
University, Calcutta 700 032 and Printed by Arijit Kumar
at Technoprint, 7 Sri Sudhar Dutta Lane, Calcutta 700 004.

ISSN 0448-1143

THE 'NATIONAL' IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE : PRO AND CON

Henry H. H. Remak

As one reads general essays on Comparative Literature, especially by the younger generation of American scholars, he is frequently struck by the critical if not pejorative handling even of the inherently neutral adjective 'national' (though not the noun 'nation') and particularly its derivatives 'nationalist' and (perhaps a shade worse) 'nationalistic'. One senses the contamination in the use of these terms from increasingly negative colourings like 'traditional', 'passé', 'dated', 'anachronistic', 'narrow', 'antagonistic toward other cultures' and, finally, 'chauvinistic', which conjures up two devastating world wars in the first half of our century. It is stated or implied that 'national literature' is an outmoded concept that should be dissolved into the vast seas of 'literature', 'culture', 'discourse', 'speech', 'message', 'écriture', 'code'. On the opposite side of the spectrum, it is broken down into more homey, more communal, less threatening components such as 'regional' or 'ethnic' which reflect the universal tendency in the last two decades to save and restore collective identities closer to the grass roots.

There are historically substantive as well as ideological-psychological reasons for this state of affairs, and varying mixtures of both. On the historical side, it is a matter of record that the most devastating European conflicts since the Thirty Years' War took place, only twenty years apart, in this century and that the first one, at any rate, was certainly avoidable; it was not so much caused by nationalism (rather, slid into as a consequence of political/strategic alliances) as fuelled by it once it had begun. Worse, it spawned more, not less nationalism among both victor and vanquished states once it was over and thus led to an even more catastrophic Second World War, hardly had Europe recovered from the first one.¹

The residue of Western nationalism after World War II has, in comparison, been markedly subdued. Since 1945 and particularly since the 1960s, West European and North American intelligentsia has, on the whole, moved toward the Liberal Left Centre. A Liberal, as the word indicates, frees himself from parochial prejudice, understands non-conformist, non-mainstream thinking, resists togetherness promoted from above. When I started my university studies in the 1930s I would hear faculty members in the Arts and Sciences say : 'He is a Liberal, but ...'; today they would be likelier to say : 'He is a conservative, but ...'. The role of the intellectuals in the West is to provide a well established, securely fastened political, economic, and social system of a nation with the critical analysis it needs to stay on its toes. 'Pointing with pride', while

yield of a down-to-earth environment where seeds wither, languish or bloom. Literary works are manifestations of a *culture* in the fullest sense of the term : nature + spirit, yet every plant specimen is unique while it also shares in generic characteristics common to many others in the same category. Personal culture is not necessarily monolingual, mono-national. Lessing, Wieland, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Kafka, Brecht were 'at home' in two or more cultures : so were Shakespeare, Carlyle, Rolland and Gide, Lafcadio Hearn, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

Even if the evolution of contemporary Western culture, of which comparative literature is a part, points to internationalism without a deliberate national base, this does not change the fact that, historically, Comparative Literature is an extension of national literature : any historical approach to international and intercultural literature will have to take this into account — and there are indications that the historical-contextual dimensions of the study of literature are reasserting themselves. Even in the West, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, patriotic pride (which is not synonymous with 'nationalism' : it is a positive stance toward your own heritage but not necessarily a downgrading of other traditions and values : see Romanticism) has reasserted itself, mainly outside of academia, in the last ten years. Without Herder, Madame de Staël or Sismondi no history of comparative literature can be written. They believed in national/ethnic/cultural characteristics as part of a fascinating pluralistic world. Ethnic revival within a nation has occurred in political systems all over the globe in the last two decades; it has also made a distinct and probably lasting mark in American academia.

I do not wish to duplicate the survey Brandt Corstius and I undertook in 1964 of the origins and consequences of the bi-national and cosmopolitan tendencies of Comparative Literature from its beginnings to the post World War II years, but rather add the perspective of the last quarter of the century that has lapsed since that effort was carried out.² Suffice it to say that I tried to distinguish between 'the cosmopolitan view of mankind, fostered by the rationalistic wing of Enlightenment, which 'stressed what humanity (not only Western humanity) has in common (Voltaire, Lessing)', and 'the national approach to history, likewise arising from Enlightenment, but consequently promoted by Romanticism', which 'is no less interested in other cultures, but looks for the more or less unique configuration assumed by cultures within their environmental context (Montesquieu, Herder). The cosmopolitan view stressed the normative, the national one the relative.'³ What has happened since then is a new shuffle of these elements. The bi-national (occasionally multi-national) approach, while still widely practised, is no longer in vogue with the consensus of the West. Instead, all literature regardless of origin and

still predominantly practised in this country, less or more subtly, in promoting one's own career, department, family, immediate community, or even state, is no longer 'chic' when extended to one's university, especially large ones, let alone society and nation.

Comparatists tend to be fugitives from concentration on one national literature or, more recently, one discipline. To justify their *raison d'être* they are bound to look askance at their fettered beginnings and their more 'parochial' colleagues. And they have very good reason to reject as inorganic and quantitative the view of some comparative literature programmes dominated by conservative national language departments that our field of labour is an arithmetic sum : complete historical command of one national literature plus complete historical command of another one. That requirement builds on the illusion that a seamless acquaintance with German literature from the *Hildebrandslied* to Peter Handke and with French literature, from Sainte Eulalie to Claude Simon equals comparative literature.

Of late, however, more 'der Not gehorchend' than 'dem eignen Trieb' Comparative Literature Programmes, at least in the United States, have rehabilitated national literatures in the curricula for their own majors. One cannot help but surmise that the principal if, to be sure, not the only reason for this reaction has been the attrition of university jobs in comparative literature and a corresponding rise in academic positions in national language, literature, and culture departments, sometimes with comparative literature as a helpful secondary asset. Foreign Language is, after all, still considered a 'solid' (if not overly popular) subject by American society : it is a tangible, distinctive, teasable skill that has increasing utilitarian value in view of the active investments of Western Europe and Japan in our domestic industries plus the realization, which has finally dawned on our business and industrial leaders, that making money in a foreign country requires more than sending managers abroad who are, no matter how competent in their trade, insulated from the foreign culture.

I would like to think, however, that a complementary reason for this return to specific foreign components of comparative literature has to do with the awareness that our more recent crops of comparative literature majors, enamoured of theory, of theses in various guises, of dialects of 'disciplines' rather than geographic cultures, and no longer coming primarily from a first home in a national language and literature, have lost touch with the diachronic and synchronic roots of literature in a specific soil or a combination of distinctive soils, and above all in a specific language.

'Nation' derives from 'natus'='born' and, by extension, nurtured both physically and spiritually — and that can hardly be a matter of indifference to our outlook on life and lore. Comparative Literature has been increasingly practised as verbal acrobatics on a tightrope high above ground rather than the

identities. I am not speaking, *bien entendu*, of a deliberate effort but of an awareness that the linguistic, literary and artistic heritage of a nation may be a steadier guarantee of survival under politically adverse conditions than a constitution, a central government or an army. In this respect, national literature may rival family and religion in importance as a guarantor of continuity. And while we make much, deservedly, of the current internationalization of literature, it is possible that a consciousness of one's own literature may loom larger again as a refuge from modernist lifestyle standardization and, for individual nations in Western Europe, from Europeanization, let alone Americanization.

Conversely, the absence of such a binder in culturally, linguistically, ethnically diverse nations or would-be nations is a very serious hindrance toward achieving political stability: witness Belgium, Canada, Spain (Catalonia, the Basque country), Fiji, Malaysia and many African states. What we have, therefore, is two compensating, simultaneous, separate trends; in the 'developed' nations, the push toward pluralism; in the 'developing' nations, pressure toward national togetherness. In practice, this may result in compensating tendencies within the same nation: cultural individuality as the price to be paid by central government for political togetherness (Canada, India, the Soviet Union, Spain, Yugoslavia).

The equivalent of 'national' has been applied not only to literature but also the complexion of 'national schools' of comparative literature scholarship. The most common and most controversial use in the past has been to distinguish between a 'French' and an 'American' School of Comparative Literature, understood as the tension between a more historical, positivistic, biographic, diachronic 'French' and a more 'literary', analytic, text-oriented 'American' criticism, between literature viewed as a document and as a monument. Much water has flowed down the Loire and the Mississippi, respectively, since the apex of that debate in the 1950s and early 1960s. A look at any current issue of the most prestigious French and American comparative literature journals, the *Revue de Littérature Comparée* and *Comparative Literature*, shows that these differences still exist. As noted on an earlier occasion,⁴ the highly centralized nature of the French educational system, particularly on the most advanced level (agrégation, doctorat d'état) and the centripetal position of Paris and the Sorbonne have indeed favoured a cohesiveness of approach among French comparatists of the past without equivalent in the extremely decentralized American system — or lack of system — of higher education, thus ensuring a great deal of comparative pluralism on this side of the ocean. But, as the richly informative, recent survey of the research interests of French comparatists⁵ shows, French research directions in Comparative Literature are now healthily

circumstances serves the theoreticians as eclectic props for theory. This strikes me as a belated adjustment to the Social 'Sciences' dominated by models rather than cultures, though they seem somewhat of a reversion to comparative culture studies in the last decade. This 'replicable model' impetus came to the Social Sciences from the Sciences, which are, however, in a far better position to test, experimentally, their constructs, themselves often arrived at inductively rather than deductively. Empiric verification, hard data are far more difficult to get at in the Social Sciences than in the Sciences. They are also problematic (but not impossible) in the Humanities because of the subjective nature of our texts, but at least tangible, specific, explicit, usually written texts are the permanent basis of our business rather than elusive behaviour. In order to enhance our activities, we have probably made these texts much more mysterious than they are.

Be that as it may, comparative literature has steadily been displaced, in fact, by 'general literature', even though it still runs, at least in the United States, under the more prestigious name of comparative literature. This, then, is the new equivalent to cultural cosmopolitanism: the democratizing sauce of 'écriture'. It is not concerned with the normative in the sense of more generally valid or at least workable characteristics of literature derived inductively from a reasonably representative, systematic analysis of complete texts from various historical and cultural backgrounds. Instead, it has 'adopted' from Romanticism the relativity of all norms but certainly not the passion for national and ethnic cultures separate but equal on which this pluralism rested.

There has also been a promising tendency toward a new alignment of cultural entities around maritime centres. We have heard, for a long time, about 'Mediterranean culture', but we have just started analysing seriously and in detail literary constants as well as variables in the cradle of Western civilization, the Mediterranean Sea, in modern times. The Atlantic and Pacific rims have already established themselves as economic, political, military and anthropological realities: it is time we examined the literary potential of that model and tested it against such well-known theories as Henri Pirenne's definition of maritime vs. continental cultures.

The non-national direction in which the apple cart of Western comparative scholarship has been tilted of late has been countered, simultaneously, by the genesis of new national states in Africa and Asia, just as the old ones in Europe began to fade as anchors for comparative literature research. History proves that the promotion of national literature and art models is an essential and effective building block in the consolidation of a state. Dante, Manzoni and Verdi are probably as fundamental to the Italian national consciousness as Garibaldi and Cavour, Cervantes and Calderon, Racine, Voltaire and Hugo, Goethe and Schiller have been in contributing to their respective national

NATIONAL LITERATURE VIS-A-VIS COMPARATIVE LITERATURE : THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE AND POINT OF VIEW

Swapan Majumdar

The idea of Comparative Literature, we all know, was the outcome of a transitional phase of European civilization, when, tired with the long spells of warfare among the constituent countries themselves, the pioneering minds of leading nations pleaded earnestly for a cultural understanding beyond the confines of one's own National Literature. At least the founding fathers conceived of Comparative Literature as an antidote to the possibility of growth of an overweening chauvinism for one's National Literature. And for them National Literatures were subsystems of Comparative Literature and hence the scope of the discipline consisted in the inter-National literary comparisons alone. Comparatists from Posnett (1886) to Prawar (1973) believed, "The most ambitious type of comparative literary study is that which undertakes to define and compare different national traditions. ..." Their approaches, therefore, were in the main horizontal and based on Impact-Response paradigms where in literary cultures the emitters were almost mechanically considered 'major' and the recipients by implication 'minor'.

But the concept of 'nation' itself has undergone a sea-change in the meantime. Consequently, the older ideas of nationhood as emanating from a geographical enclosure, or that of nationality as belonging to an ethnic or else a religious community are mostly out of date. Yet, we have hardly been able to come out of the inhibitions of the language-bound concept of nationality. Now, in a multilingual country like India, which of the seventeen scheduled language based literatures could be assigned the status of National Literature? It should be remembered that even though Hindi and English are being used for all practical purposes as parallel link languages, no one language has so far been officially accepted as the National Language.

Frankly speaking, none of the older major languages like Sanskrit, Pali or Prakrit, not to speak of Apabhramsa, might be regarded as the National Language of India at any given point of time. Each of these languages had been the vocabulary either of a class only, or a community or a sect or was itself an artificial construct of the court hardly reaching the masses. Between the two languages that came on the heels of two colonial regimes, Persian and English, the first nearly remained a culture specific speech, but the latter, of course because of better manipulation and tactics, penetrated into the deeper layers of the national psyche. The Turks, Iranians, Afghans and the Arabs who invaded

At the same time, new (relatively speaking) nations active in Comparative Literature, such as India, which are trying to find a meeting ground between national profile and regional identity, *are* understandably interested in embracing intercultural approaches in tune with *their* internal cultural situation rather than that of another culture. With so many heritages *inside* the political structure of their nation, Indian comparative literature is strongly oriented toward Indian cultures and methodology appropriate to *their* situation,⁶ though far from exclusively. Analogous concerns certainly apply to Mainland China where Comparative Literature is making a strong start,⁷ and will ultimately emerge in African nations.

In conclusion : 'Nation' and 'National' may be concepts with which some comparative scholars of the present do not feel comfortable for historical, ideological, ethnic and personal reasons. But that does not invalidate the legitimacy of the terminology in time and space. Since many cultures cut across nations and vice versa, and since interdisciplinarity is clearly in the ascendancy in Comparative Literature, it is, however, to be expected that 'culture' will increasingly gain 'nation' in the theory and practice of Comparative Literature but without displacing it. Pluralism implies selective tolerance; the national element is a fact that cannot be excluded from it.

NOTES

1 See my 'Impact of Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Comparative Literature from the 1880's to the Post World War II Period', *Proceedings of the IVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, The Hague, Mouton, 1966, 390-97, where some of the terminological and historical problems are taken up in greater detail.

2 Jan Brandt Corstius, 'The Impact of Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism on Comparative Literature from the Beginning to 1880', *Proceedings* (op. cit.), 380-89. For my essay, see preceding reference.

3 Ibid., 394.

4 Henry H. H. Remak, 'Comparative Literature at the Crossroads : Diagnosis, Therapy, and Prognosis', *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, IX (1960), 16.

5 *La Recherche en Littérature Générale et Comparée en France*, Paris, Société Française de Littérature Générale et Comparée, 1983, 416 pp.

6 At the Indian Comparative Literature Congress held in New Delhi in January of 1987, 'Professor Namwar Singh... called upon scholars to fight 'the politics of comparative literature' and to learn from Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Tagore who laid the foundation of a national comparative literature, and not look for ideas to Western comparatists ...' (M. Waseem in *The Statesman*, New Delhi, January 14, 1987, p. 5.)

7 It will be interesting to compare, in a few years, the directions comparative literature scholarship will take in Mainland China compared to Taiwan which has had a much earlier start. The same goes for a comparison between Comparative Literature as pursued in West and East Germany.

Indian socio-cultural structure deserves a somewhat different treatment. I would like to put forward here the observations of Ramvilas Sarma, an eminent Marxist critic himself, whose authority in Indian culture can hardly be disputed. After comparing the Indian literary situation with several Western literary situations, Sri Sarma comes to the conclusion that 'The feudals might have felt the necessity of national unity, but the urgency of it was even more intensely realized by people at large. Their social, economic and cultural development did not rest on the conflict of states (as was usual in a feudal set-up), but on co-operation ; their well-being was not inherent in battles and expeditions of the kings, but in mutual fraternity. The feudals who had political control in their grip, could not integrate the country ; but the poets who had no say in state affairs, could unite people culturally.' Even if one glances hurriedly through the pages of Indian literary history, one would be amazed not only by the immaculate description of the topography of the country, but by the vivid recordings of the aspirations of the people from Vyasa's *Mahābhārata* down to Maithilisaran's *Bharatbharti*. This proves beyond doubt that the common history, economy and philosophy of the people have called for a commitment to an awareness of belonging to a nationality through the ages.

Popularly in India the study of inter-literary relations among different National Literatures is more or less unquestioningly taken to be the domain of Comparative Literature. But intra-literary relations are still considered to be an exclusive jurisdiction of single literature disciplines. Scholars even suspect that the dynamics of National Literature, if excessively stressed, might blur the distinctive features of Regional Literatures. They often forget that comparative literary methodology aims not only at studying Literature as a phenomenon but also as a process, and that it is precisely on this score that Indian Literature as a whole opens up for a student of Literature an enormous and intricate matrix of literary communication.

In fact, the Indian literary situation excels in what Dionyz Durisin calls 'polyfunctionality'⁶ in the context of Slovak literature. Pre-modern texts like *Gītāgovindam*, *Caryāpadas* or Bhakti poems (for example, the sacred book of the Sikhs, *Guru Granth Sāhib* compiled by Nanakdev, was virtually a compilation of the best sayings of the Bhakti poets) were claimed by more than one literature at a time. Even modern Indian authors like Premchand or Bendre had been bilingual not by compulsion but choice. Apart from these, instances of programmatic transference are also found in abundance in the Indian literary heritage. The expositions of the *Gītā* from Jnanadeva's *Jñāneśvarī* to Tilak's *Gītārāhasya* with the corpus of translations in various Indian languages or the dissemination of Gandhi's doctrines and vision through the different language versions of the *Harijan* or the *Young India* served identical purposes.

Hence an Indian author or text is required to be read simultaneously in⁷

India a number of times and established a rule which lasted for nearly six centuries, used to speak not one but a variety of languages, viz Turkish, Persian and Pushtu besides Arabic. But when they were domiciled in this country, all of them switched over to a new-fangled language, Urdu, the use of which distinguishes Indian muslims from their brethren in other parts of the planet. On the contrary, it is difficult to ascertain whether Indian creative authors writing in English belong to the mainstream of Indian Literature or that of English Literature, which has become more problematic now by their being claimed by the *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*.² But this problem does not arise with Bengali, Nepali, Panjabi, Sindhi or Urdu even though these languages are spoken and written by the citizens of two different countries at the same time, for the ethos that underlies them is made of the essentials of the subcontinent. Furthermore, like Maithili, Sindhi and Urdu, English is not a state-language, though a state-language-based literature does not necessarily qualify to be reckoned as the National Literature either. The equation between the emergence of a language and the rise of a nationality or the nation-state parity can hardly be borne out by the Indian historical experience. 'The crucial criterion is', writes Irfan Habib, 'whether the people of the particular region began to be conscious in explicit terms of their unity (separately from others) and expressed aspirations to have a separate state of their own. Such consciousness is lacking in the entire range of 17th and 18th century regional literatures. ... It would be unhistorical to read them back further into the past.'³ Judged from this point of view, the idea of a particular language-based National Literature does not hold good in the Indian situation even today.

Should we, then, consider Indian Literature as an aggregate of the literary activities pursued in the various component subnational literatures? That is, treat Indian Literature as the National Literature and the Regional Literatures as its subnational constituents? But, would that be tenable had there not been a literary centralism in the Indian situation? Recently a visiting professor at Delhi University, John Oliver Perry, boldly pounced on 'Indianness' by misprizing it as a 'political issue' rather than a 'critical' one.⁴ Such designs of demolishing the concept of Indian unity are not unknown to us, nor is an outsider expected to have understood the ties of Indian life and letters during a short stay or from a few visits. But dissenting voices— certainly more political than philosophical — are not absent among Indians themselves. Some neo-Marxist critics, taking their cue from the second model of Stalin's 'Marxism and the National Question', are inclined to believing that multilingual states came into existence where feudalism could not be thoroughly uprooted and capitalist development was slow as in East European countries, and highlighted the diversities rather than the unity of the nation and its literatures. But the

the issue. I have stated my position with regard to the problem extended to the Indian context in my recently published book *Comparative Literature : Indian Dimensions* (Calcutta, 1987). Here I have tried not to repeat what I have already said, but enlarge some of the ideas earlier framed.]

NOTES

- 1 S.S. Prawer, 'National Character and National Literature', *Comparative Literary Studies* (New York, 1973), p. 13.
- 2 George Sampson, 'Anglo-Indian Literature', *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (London, 1965 ; first published 1941), pp. 909ff.
- 3 Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian History* (Shillong, n.d. [1986]), p. 45.
- 4 'Indianness' as a Political or a Critical Issue for India's Literatures', *New Quest* 62 (March-April 1987), 91-97. •
- 5 'Multilingual Nationalism and Literature', *Problems of Indian Literary History* (Hindi), (Delhi, 1986), pp. 31-32. Translation mine. •
- 6 *Theory of Literary Comparatistics* (Bratislava, 1984), p. 296.

relation to his/its position in the regional language and in conjunction with that in the national literary system, that is, in Indian Literature. Effects observed on these two planes would not, however, be similar on either end. For example, Saratchandra's stature in Bengali literature is less than his reputation in Indian Literature or Agyeya's status in his own literature outshines his estimation in the other literatures of India. On another level, the polysystem of a culture with its component ecological, economic, social, philosophical, political or technological subsystems may also stand in a comparable proximity to Indian Literature with its regional literary subsystems.

To put it in other words, every Regional Literature is exposed to endogenous or intra-literary as well as exogenous or inter-literary relations and the approach accordingly comprises both vertical and horizontal methods, which means comparative researches may be operative in the Indian context in as many permutations and combinations of relations as are possible among Regional Literatures, Indian Literature and other National Literatures. Indian Literature as a body of contents and a set of relations may, then, be analysed in seven broad spectrum interactions :

- 1 Regional Literatures in India are primarily the constituents of its National Literature, that is, Indian Literature ;
- 2 Regional Literatures are secondarily the inheritors and keepers of the Indian literary heritage ;
- 3 Regional Literatures may and in fact do interact among themselves, which as a result modifies the National Literature ;
- 4 Regional Literatures may act as the recipients of other National Literatures, when the residual of such receptions by and by percolates in its own National Literature ;
- 5 Regional Literatures apiece may also influence other National Literatures;
- 6 Indian Literature as a body may undergo an impact, literary or otherwise, that gradually manifests itself in different Regional Literatures ; and
- 7 Indian Literature as a body may create an image, literary or otherwise, in other National Literatures which is again attributed to all its component literatures.

In fine, Indian Literature is not an artificial construct devised for national integration from the top, but a reality that springs from the very core of its fountain-head of life-patterns. Nor is it a goblin to devour all regional identities. Such imaginary threats are publicized only to gain ends, anything but literary.

[My note is but an appendix to Professor Henry Remak's illuminating presentation, though written before I had an opportunity to know his views on

European-American West as well as through the colonial and post-colonial India. Hence the curious assortment of names. The fact that he restricts his critical attention by severely bracketing the political context of culture and history doesn't strike him as important. I should think that this typical facet of humanistic closure requires the critic systematically to avoid an analysis of the domination and exploitation that are inevitably involved in the construction of any cultural artifact or relationship.

This is what I call an imposition of a canon of 'modernism' — but a canon that draws its strength from a derivative discourse generated by a long history of English studies in Indian Universities as a civilizing subject. I object to the establishment of a canon not only because it would entail severe restrictions upon the way the canonical texts should be approached : restriction of a quasi-religious sort designed to stifle any genuinely critical attitude towards the canonized texts ; but also because, it seeks to create a 'Modernism' outside history. There is an added dimension to Ayyub's canon. It presents itself in rhetoric designed to conceal its ideological basis. On the face of it, the canon is remarkably catholic, and remembering the fact that canonization depends not on what one says about texts so much as where one says it from, the attitude looks unimpeachably neutral and secular. But it isn't really so. Canons grow out of anxiety and out of a desire to legislate through a political ideology which they must mask as they are imposed. In recent years, canons have been employed to hide what I would call the politics of apoliticality. Witness, for instance, William Bennet's (U.S. Secretary of Education) list of sacred books, prescribed in 'To Reclaim a Legacy : Text Of Report on Humanities in Education' published in *Chronicle of Higher Education* for November 28, 1984.

Robert Scholes has drawn our attention to the curious fact that the three English words, 'cannon', 'cane' and 'canon' have the same etymological root. 'Britain imposed its will on the world and became an imperial power by means of the cannon and the cane, subduing the foreigners by the cannon of its navy and controlling its own sailors by liberal use of the cane. Law and power : the gun, the cane, and, of course, the book. Where the Empire went, the canon and the cannon went too.'²

Canon thus acquires the power to prescribe, and also, to proscribe. Ayyub's canon proscribes a very large area in modern literature which he finds vitiated by 'an overwhelming consciousness of evil' — presumably, both social and moral. In fact, the whole book is given to a systematic denunciation of the strong sense of evil and the irrational in modern literature, Baudelaire being the central target of assault, and a reclamation of the lost legacy of 'sanity' which he posits as the great tradition of modernism. Ayyub's case issues in a deep suspicion of the disorganized and the subversive, the irrational and the radical.

ON LOCATING THE 'MODERN' IN BENGALI LITERARY HISTORY

Bikash Chakravarty

The immediate provocation for this paper comes from what I take to be a standard statement on modernism in Bengali literature that occurs in the preface to Abu Sayeed Ayyub's *Modernism and Rabindranath*, in Bengali, published in 1968. The book, I gather, has now passed into a classic and, considering the extraordinary prestige of Ayyub as a literary critic and a man of letters in the 70s, coupled with his personal elegance for a large number of Bengali intellectuals who knew him, I have reasons to suspect that the statement in question now enjoys the status of a canon. Here is the passage in English translation :

Modern literature is not necessarily a literature of hatred, rejection and anger ... Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Camus's *Outsider*, Manik Bandyopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi*, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali*, and Buddhadeva Bose's *Tapasvi O Tarangini* should be ranked among the great works of all times and all places. Among the recent Bengali poets, Amiya Chakravarty is of course my favourite ; but I have not been prevented from appreciating the poetry of Bishnu Dey and Subhas Mukhopadhyay by our differences in political opinion. Similarly, in spite of my 'differences with Sudhindranath Datta and later Buddhadeva Bose in literary views, I fully acclaim the excellence of their literary creativity and endorse the permanent historical value of their works, as I do, on a higher level, the excellence of Baudelaire, Valéry, Faulkner and Kafka. They are all moderns. (There is some doubt about Bibhutibhushan though ; he is a modern by temporal standard, but belongs to an earlier age by temperament.)¹

By his own admission, Ayyub is not prepared to consider the literature of hatred, rejection and anger as properly 'modern' or as 'permanently modern'. I shall examine other specific omissions in a moment. Meanwhile let us note two related points. First, Ayyub's notion of the 'modern' is far less historical than normative. That is, he is not so much interested in locating the modern as a problem of periodization in literary history, as taking an essentialist view of modernism. And there, he is in good company with Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater -- a significant link, I claim. Second, Ayyub treats modernism as a single, coherent phenomenon, constructed of masterpieces built by geniuses. He conceives of a central tradition in modernism running through the

gender. He feels threatened if the centre is dislocated and the seat of power usurped. Predictably, he tends to characterize the enemy as barbarians bent on destroying all humane values, with 'humane' a synonym in the modern-liberal lexicon for all things rational, all things civilized, good and to be cherished.

I say all this because I find that the notion of the 'modern' in current Bengali critical literature has always operated through canonization and an uncritical acceptance of a derivative discourse. Ayyub's list of 'sacred' books has its problems, but any list would, which is one argument against making them. I am not so much worried about the list as such as about the canonizing effect, about the discourse that permits the list to operate. I find this discourse to have been derived entirely from the Anglo-American conception of literary modernism with all its limitations. But this should not be understood simply as the result of a conservative tendency to fillet out from literary history all those writers and literary movements whose works do not conform to the elevated and elitist requirements of High Modernism, but as the effect of the institutions and the institutional discourses for which this modernism is important.

For instance, it was important for the discourses of the British Orientalists and the liberals which sought to invent a 'modern' India under the rubric of 'Renaissance' in the nineteenth century. Discourses, in this context, consist in a certain regularity of statements which then define an object — whether it be sexuality or madness, criminality or economics, principles of rationality or colonial India — and supply a set of concepts which can be used to analyse the object, to delimit what can and cannot be said about it, and to demarcate who can say it. But the regularity which produces a discursive practice should not be confused with a logical or systematic coherence. It is a historical event, and not the realization of some pre-existent system. As discourse defines its object, there are no criteria of truth external to it. The truth of a discourse is, according to Foucault, a rhetorical imposition. We believe a colonialist discourse to be true because we have no alternative. And in the case of the colonialist discourse, I should like to add, both power and discourse are possessed entirely by the colonizer.

One interesting result of the colonialist discourse was to create successfully a Manichean allegory that still persists in our post-colonial situation : on one hand, the image of a primordial India, inert and dark, savage and subversive, the 'other' that posed a potential threat to the dissemination of the process of colonization; and on the other, the image of a modern-progressive India, rational and secular, liberal and humanist, the India of the English-educated elites. The evil and the good. This latter image does, of course, presuppose the unity of the colonial subject, both colonizer and colonized at some rarefied, theoretical level. In practice, however, the unity means simply that the natives

Why? Because Ayyub thinks that the literatures of anger, hatred and rejection represent a decline from rationality and progress — two post-Enlightenment European myths fundamental to liberal ideology and imported into the colony by the British imperialists and perpetrated through the English studies. Hence, excluded from Ayyub's canon are *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*; works of James Joyce, and Joseph Conrad, radical modernism of constructivism, surrealism and Brechtian epic theatre. Excluded also are Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, Jibanananda Das, Satinath Bhaduri and Mahasweta Devi. The list can easily be swelled. There are minds and minds; every canon has its apocrypha, every faith its heretics.

But this is not the whole story. Ayyub also admonishes those modern poets and critics —, shall we say, the postmodernists? — who believe in the materiality of language, in the self-referentiality of discourse. What Ayyub wants is transparency as explicit ideal, the use of language as a lens to see beyond, to have a centre or meaning which is ontologically prior to the discourse. This is a central assertion of the Anglo-American liberal humanism and its critical tradition, extending, at least, up to F.R. Leavis. One is struck by the coincidence that exactly two years earlier than Ayyub's book, Derrida launched his first frontal attack on the traditional humanist position through his paper, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' read at a symposium called 'The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man' held at the Johns Hopkins Humanities Centre in 1966.

Derrida's attack can be understood as a critique of the notion of language as transparency, of concepts and hierarchies which are essential to traditional criteria of certainty, identity and truth and, which achieve their status only by repressing other elements. This is the issue of 'decentering', the point of which is that there is, in effect, no point, no origin, no place outside discourse from which to fix, make determinate and establish metaphysical boundaries, or, to retrieve the '*prizing of the imperial cogito*'. The centre which abides through various fictive appellations, from subjects to substance to *telos*, transcendentality, conscience, man or god, is the creation of the force of desire. Desire attempts to establish centre as objective reality, the ground of all grounds, the metaphysical truth in itself, that masters all anxiety and grants final reassurance. It aims to make the subject 'see' itself as a transcendental self, an absolutely free agent, unproduced, given once and for all. In short, Derrida's critique forces us to recognize that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, and so does not function to anchor the sign securely in any extra-linguistic reality.

Ayyub may not have read Derrida in 1968. But there is an unmistakable tone of anxiety about his insistence on meaning as ontologically prior to the speech, on retaining the immutable transcendental self across a range of social practices as the locus of power, imperial and, in all likelihood, masculine in

of 'minor literature' — or has even forced them to disappear from canonical considerations altogether. And the myth of canonical ideologies egregiously exclude or devalue not only certain texts but also the social groups that they effectively represent. Canons, in this case, merely serve to reinforce the values of the critical 'right', namely those critical positions consciously or unconsciously complicit with the hegemonic dominance of bourgeois-patriarchal values. The modern liberal humanist discourse thus begins to look like a diversionary tactic for hard times in our post-colonial situation. We remain suspended always on the threshold of a change that never occurs.

How should we then make a positive response to this awareness of the investments of the sites of culture in institutional and ideological power? It's too large an issue for me to address here. I can only affirm, with Robert Scholes that no text is so trivial as to be outside the bounds of humanistic study and that we have to study texts, modern or no, in their full historical context. Which is to say that in forming a notion of the modern, we must attempt some grasp, in an untotalizing way, of the heterogenous and non-synchronous developments that have so far eluded our literary critics. The concept of the literary period is better served by notions of heterogeneity than by those various ontological notions of substantial unity which underwrite the history of ideas in the mode of A.O. Lovejoy and all other attempts at continuous history. As Hillis Miller put it, 'Periods differ from one another because there are different forms of heterogeneity, *not because each period held a single coherent view of the world.*' (Emphasis mine)⁴

NOTES

- 1 Abu Sayeed Ayyub, *Adhunikata o Rabindranath* (Calcutta, 1968), p.7.
- 2 Robert Scholes, 'Aiming Canon at a Curriculum', *Salmagundi* (Fall 1986), p. 102.
- 3 Cited in Edward W. Said, 'Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World', *Salmagundi* (Spring Summer 1986), pp. 51-52.
- 4 'Deconstructing the Deconstructors', *Diacritics* 5 (Summer 1975), 31.

accept a version of the colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production. That is, the circle now is drawn around the 'rational' and the 'irrational', 'we' and 'they', or, adapting George Orwell's famous distinction in Salman Rushdie's terms, around those inside the whale and those outside it. Rushdie says: 'Outside the whale is the unceasing storm, the continual quarrel, the dialectic of history. Outside the whale, there is a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world ... Outside the whale, the writer is obliged to accept that he (or she) is part of the crowd, part of the ocean, part of the storm, so that objectivity becomes a great dream, like perfection, an unattainable goal for which one must struggle in spite of the impossibility of success.'³

Those who are inside the whale, have privileged reason, order and stability over flux and discontent because they have been exposed to the effects of Western humanism through British liberal education which could exist and continue in the colony only on the active and direct 'consent' of the dominated. The first phase of the exposure consisted in an instruction in the power of reason, the primacy of the natural sciences, and the dominance of empirical methods. The second phase articulated a subtler cultural argument in resting its case not so much in the reading of Locke, Bentham, Mill or the Positivists as in the passionate reading in English literature as a civilizing subject.

It is from inside the whale that Bishnu Dey speaks in what seems to be another instance of canonization. In a lecture delivered at Calcutta University in 1966 on Tagore and the Problem of Modernity, Bishnu Dey located the beginning of our modernism in the so-called Bengal 'Renaissance', Tagore being its most influential transmitter, 'the first and the most original example'. I am prepared to accept Bishnu Dey's claim, but not on his grounds. For if Tagore is our first modern by virtue of being the greatest product of the so-called Renaissance, it isn't much of an argument, because it is part of the colonialist discourse. If Tagore is modern because he expresses, in his long career, an extraordinary degree of self-awareness, identity crisis, tension and, finally, resolution in creative unity ('সৃষ্টির ঐক্যময় বোধ') that isn't much of an argument either; for it is also part of a game whose rules have already been framed and canonized by a long Anglo-American critical tradition running undisturbed from Matthew Arnold to New Criticism via F.R. Leavis. But Bishnu Dey, along with Ayyub, is inside the whale, from where he can construct a concept of modernism as a single coherent object that defines an epiphanic tradition from Wordsworth to Wallace Stevens and, in which Tagore has a safe place. What happens to the works and writers who do not conform to the standards set by this elitist critical tradition is anybody's guess. The inherited, pedagogically assumed canon has simply seen fit to relegate them to the status

more agony, madness and disintegration. It is horrifying precisely because it is so engorged with the torments and the sorrows of the present moment that the only future human beings can wish for is the cessation of all movement, for the sterile immobility of stones.

This interpretation contradicts those critics who assert that the Gothic novelist is either a part of an old mystical tradition or a dreamer of eschatology. Devendra P. Varma, for instance, begins his influential book *The Gothic Flame* by correctly insisting that the 'Gothic novel appeals to the night-side of the soul.' But, instead of exploring the relationship of the horror-ridden Self to the actual world, he is taken in by the Gothic novel's religious ambience. Relying upon old assumptions about primitive magic and religion⁶ and subjective metaphysical speculation, he offers the Gothic novel as a kind of irrationalist experience which produces a strange mystical 'thrill'. The Gothic novel is for him a part of the Christian spiritual tradition of which the Gothic cathedral is a majestic expression. He does not recognize that this religious tradition in which he places the Gothic novel cannot exist without any historical foundation in a human community. Therefore, he refuses to consider that religion could also be regarded as 'a social idea, a product of the activity of the collective whole',⁷ or as a cultural or ideological system which gives meaning to our individual experiences. This strategy helps him to equate the experience of the medieval mystic with that of a man trapped in an entirely different history in the Gothic novel. In the Gothic novel, he asserts, man goes on a long phantasmagoric journey through a strange world, at once grotesque and sublime, miasmatic and full of supernal wonder, towards the knowledge of the Holy.⁸ Varma's recognition of the analogous relationship between the structure of the Gothic novel and the hieratic grandeur⁹ of the medieval cathedral is perceptive. However, he misconstrues the exact nature of the imaginative and ethical impulses which led the Gothic novelists to look towards the middle ages for a structure of values which could make comprehensible their sense of loss of tranquillity, their moral or spiritual insecurity. His concern with religion as separate from any social reality does not clarify the responses of the Gothic novelist to the wonder and the joy which infuses the medieval cathedral and the piety which informs the worldview of its builders.

In contradiction, I shall argue that in the Gothic novel the medieval cathedral and the Gothic ruin are not symbolic of the same mystical attitude; both do not commemorate and reactivate cosmogony, nor do both create a sacred space where the 'numen' is experienced in the profane world.¹⁰ The Gothic novel, written during a specific period of socio-political strife,¹¹ is not an uncanny affirmation of the world as a sacred script; it is not a divine celebration in which the pilgrim Self in ecstacy 'dreams of being your (God's) completer/and — of his own completed-ness' (Kilke). There is, of course, an analogical relationship

SACRED AND DEMONIC SPACE : THE GOTHIC CATHEDRAL AND THE RUIN IN THE GOTHIC NOVEL

Alok Bhalla

In this paper I shall examine the ways in which the Gothic novelist uses both the vocabulary of religious rituals and eschatology as well as the symbolic and dramatic power of the Gothic cathedral and the ruin to offer a critique of a society without any recognizable moral or spiritual centre. I will argue that the Gothic novel evokes the idiom of religious rituals and the visionary grandeur of the Gothic cathedral neither to direct our gaze away from the evil that men do in the material and daily world towards some nostalgic fable of the past nor to dissolve the real problems of cruelty in a society in which inequality and perpetual conflict are inherent into some mystical dream. Indeed, religion and religious institutions in the Gothic novel are grounded in the economic, political and cultural conditions of a given society and acquire meaning in relation to the social circumstances of which they are a part.¹ More specifically, I will show that the Gothic novel borrows its images from medieval religious traditions to articulate the Self's sense of dislocation and rupture from a sacred past and its consequent inability to discover a morally or spiritually vital community. In the Gothic novel religious vocabulary is used neither to provide edifying illustrations of man's innate sinfulness and the necessity of suffering for salvation,² nor to celebrate sacred rituals full of intimations of a world 'beyond time, invulnerable to becoming'.³ Instead, it makes use of the visionary ideals of a good and religious society exemplified by the Gothic cathedral in order to elaborate demonic rituals promising nothing more than an endless succession of preternatural dreams of terror and madness, torture and agony, predatory sexuality and brutal coercion.

I should, therefore, like to argue that in the Gothic novel religious ideas and symbols provide the privileged with alibis for legitimizing their predatory actions and the poor with strategies for survival or defiance.⁴ Furthermore, metaphors borrowed from the Christian tradition are used in it not to celebrate sacred dramas ending in mystical ecstasy, but to enact and elaborate demonic rituals which promise no atonement of guilt and no symbolic reiteration of cosmogony. Those who participate in its demonic rituals of cruel degradation, 'dark slavery' (Shelley's phrase), defilement and casual brutality cannot expiate their sense of sin or shame, but can only think of themselves as 'something of a ruin wandering among ruins' (Heine). The Gothic novel is a phantasmagoria, a scandal or an abomination, precisely because at the end of its vast rituals of pain the soul is still tormented by beings drunk with demonic malice; at the end, instead of the calm certainty of knowledge there still remains more torture,

animal figures carved on cathedral walls are forms of prayer. Similarly, in Abbot Suger's designs every aspect of the earth has a magical and sacramental relation with the Divine. For him the cathedral, so filled with stone sculptures, gold and silver ornaments and incandescent glass, is a replica of the city of God. It is a holy place where human beings can rediscover, through rituals and songs the abiding bond between society, nature and God. Thus, writing on the building of St. Denis, he says :

Thus when— out of delight in the beauty of the house of God — the loveliness of the many-coloured gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of sacred virtues : then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling ... in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.²⁰

The Gothic novelists, and the Romantic poets too, recognized the medieval cathedral as a strange but awe-inspiring product of the ages of ardent faith. They perceived it, in contrast with the ruinous shrines and haunted abbeys they use in their fables, as symbolic of the religious and moral unity which their own time sadly lacked.²¹ The cathedral was for them a luminous sanctuary, a space of miracles; a sacred space where the frightfulness and the sorrow of daily life could be stilled into one vast ritual pattern bristling with the 'numen's ancient voice' (Octavio Paz's phrase).

Thus, for William Blake the Gothic as opposed to the mathematic Grecian structure, was Form alive with Imagination.²² For Wordsworth, work on his long philosophical poem 'The Recluse' was akin to the labour and the spirit of the builders of the Gothic cathedral.²³ And, Coleridge in his lectures on the Gothic declared that its complexity and variety filled him with 'a sense of self annihilation' and feelings of sublime terror :

The Greek art is beautiful. When I enter a Greek Church, my eye is charmed, and my mind elated ; I feel exalted, and proud that I am a man. But the Gothic art is sublime. On entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite ; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible impression left is, 'that I am nothing' —!²⁴

Similarly, Goethe discovered, despite the prejudices of his age,²⁵ that the cathedral of Strassburg had wholeness and grandeur, that its richness of design and its rudeness of construction was inextricably united with worship. In a remarkable passage, he says :

between the holy grandeur of the Gothic cathedral and the mysterious gloom of the ruin that haunts the Gothic novel. But this relationship is not a simple one. For, whereas the cathedral has a hierophanic centre and bounds sacred space,¹² the Gothic ruin is a place without a centre and it promises neither a return to a divine origin nor eschatology. That the Gothic novelists were aware of this radical difference between the religious faith of the medieval builders and their own political and moral uncertainty or their peculiar metaphysical anxiety should become clear in the succeeding comparison between the symbolic value of the cathedral and that of the ruin in the Gothic novel.

The medieval cathedral, as opposed to the ruin in the Gothic novel where most of the brutal actions are performed, is a heavenly mansion. Indeed, the cathedral space is charged with ethical and religious valuations which are contradictory to those attached to the Gothic ruin. Though the Gothic cathedral has the precision of geometric designs and the discipline of stones, yet its upward thrust seems to 'dissolve the heavy prose of the building into religious poetry';¹³ though it is massive and monumental, yet it suggests lightness and ecstatic flight towards being. The cathedral is at once sculptured and built by human hands, touched by the discord of nature, and filled with the intoxicating 'fantasy'¹⁴ of the Divine; it is, to use a paradoxical phrase, 'grounded in divine possibility'.¹⁵ The following passage from the *Metrical Life of St. Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln* (1225) describes the Gothic cathedral as an incantation in stone and luminous glass where the human community and the earth are commemorated as part of the Divine :

Thus the foundation is buried in the womb of the earth but walls and roof appear, and with proud daring the wall rushes towards the clouds, the roof towards the stars ... the vault spreading wide its wings like the feathered birds and as if in flight, strikes the clouds, though resting on its solid columns ... it looks not artificial but a work of nature, not a thing united, but one... As for the slender shafts themselves, which thus surround the columns, they look like (maidens) in a round dance.¹⁶

For the medieval worshipper, then, the cathedral is a form of sacred liturgy,¹⁷ a place of power and holiness. Unlike the ruin, it bounds a space where it is possible to make a 'religious valorization of the world'.¹⁸ Within its consecrated boundaries the Holy reveals itself and so enables the worshipper to repeat ritually the primordial drama of creation, fall and redemption. The fact that it continually sanctifies and purifies the world and makes the worshipper more intensely aware of nature and the human community as Divine acts of creation, was recognized by its early designers and builders. Thus for example, *The Sketchbook of Villard de Honnecourt*,¹⁹ filled with serene and quietly fanciful drawings, reveals a craftsman for whom the simplest leaf-patterns or

Thus, it is the ruin that objectifies the awareness that the Gothic novelist has of his own world as phantasmagoric. If the world of builders of the Gothic cathedral offers the possibility of transforming the world of profane time into a ritual 'succession of eternities',³⁴ the world of the Gothickist offers nothing more than a ceaseless frenzy of discontinuous activity without any spiritual meaning or purpose. Instead of living in a religious community where everyone can realize his sacred condition, the Gothic novelist lives in a 'common world of great slaughter and much sorrow' (W.H. Auden). For him, the chaos of industrial cities and the unrewarding labour on manorial farms promises nothing more than an endless series of dreams of terror. The world, as the Gothickist conceives it, is a world of 'blood and cruelty'³⁵ in which the fate of human beings is similar to that of the 'sufferers in eastern prisons, who are not allowed to taste food unless laced with poison and who perish alike whether they eat or forbear' (*M*, p. 372). Any tentative order he creates out of the torment and discontinuity of his world, after a moment's clarity, fragments and erodes.

The religious unity of the society, of which the Gothic cathedral is a symbol, makes the Gothic novelist aware of the rupture and the dislocation of his own times from the past moment of sacred plenitude. This rupture of metaphysical and moral coherence, symbolized by the ruin, is for him absolute and irreversible, for it is historically a part of the socio-economic and political catastrophies of the age in which he lives. Of course, there is a certain amount of nostalgia involved in his evocation of the sacred totality of the Gothic cathedral as a point of absolute reference. But he hardly ever turns his gaze away from the moral corruptions, the humiliations and the torments of his own historical moment towards some transcendental realm. He knows rather well that the material and social world he inhabits is inimical to all other-worldly aspirations. He, therefore, simultaneously recognizes the sacrality of which the Gothic cathedral is an image and his inability to realize his dream of identity of the Self with the Sacred. The sorrow which the fate of the Gothic hero inspires is a result of the novelist's recognition that all that is available now is the repeated failure of all humane dreams of achieving *communitas*.³⁶ Instead of the achieved unity of man and God, which the cathedral resplendently celebrates, the Gothic novelist employs the image of the ruin and religious vocabulary only to acknowledge the 'sanguinary and sensual abominations'³⁷ of the historical world in which he lives. Unlike the religious man who discovers through sacred rituals his 'mode of being in the world',³⁸ the Gothic novelist participates in demonic rituals in which man discovers that at the end of his long journey through disaffection and despair there is nothing more certain than the continuation of a life of horrible solitude, and nothing more marvellous than 'the sepulchral immensity of silence'. (Victor Hugo's phrase.)

The Gothic novel, thus, offers no consolation, no solution to greed and lust, egotism and power, no possibility of stilling the clash between good and

Under the Gothick heading, I piled up ... all the synonymous misunderstandings of the confused, the unregulated, the unnatural, the patched up, the botched, the overladen, which had ever passed through my head. Foolishly, as a people which calls all the foreign world barbaric, I named Gothick all that did not fit into my system, from the neatly-turned, gay-coloured cherub dolls and paintings our bourgeois nobility adorn their houses with, to the solemn remnants of older German architecture, whose few fantastical frettings made me join in the universal song: 'Quite squashed with ornament'. And so, as I walked towards the Minister, I shuddered in prospect of some malformed, curly-bristled ogre.

With what unlooked-for emotions did the sight surprise me, when I stepped before it! A sensation of wholeness, greatness, filled my soul; which, composed of a thousand harmonizing details, I could savour and enjoy, yet by no means understand or explain. 'So it is, men say, with the bliss of Heaven.'²⁶

Thus, the Gothic cathedral was for the Gothic novelists and the Romantic poets²⁷ not a venerable monument expressive of melancholic antiquarianism or of sentimental longings for lost moments, as critics like Montague Summers insists.²⁸ Rather, they recognized it as a place 'saturated with the sacred',²⁹ and it produced in them the agonized recognition of the irrecoverability of that moment when there exists a sacramental relationship between man and God. The cathedral was a spatial model which provided them with a vocabulary and a frame of ideal reference (mythical place of original plenitude) against which they could articulate their consciousness of change and chance, inequality and oppression in a world without a sacred centre, a catastrophic world in which the presence of God could not affirm their acts of daily and common decencies and so give value to their lives.

In contrast to the moment of ideality symbolized by the Gothic cathedral, the ruin (or any other building or place which is ruinous, dark or gruesome) in the Gothic novel is an image charged with religious and ethical valuations which are inverse of those radiated by the cathedral. The ruin reflects not only the sad fragments of time,³⁰ but simultaneously stands witness to the invasion of the sacred space of the cathedral by demonic forces. It is a contradiction, or rather, a profanation and an abomination of every aspect of the medieval cathedral. While the cathedral is 'the focus of holy power',³¹ the ruin is a place without a luminous centre or a consecrated boundary and helps the novelist to express man's anguished recognition of rupture from a sacred past and the consequent derangement of meaning.³² If the Gothic cathedral is *imago mundi*, the ruin is a region of moral and spiritual desolation; it is a desecrated space, tainted with 'worms and pollution, the sons and daughters of our bones';³³ a site of torture, of predatory sexuality, sin and preternatural revelations.

delights of a world which imagination painted in the gayest and most alluring colours, and whose hues were perhaps, not the less captivating because they were only ideas ; — such was the state to which I was destined.... It was in the convent only that people were deceitful and cruel; it was there only that misery dwelt. (*RF*, pp. 46-47)

On refusing to take monastic vows, she realizes that the world outside the convent (specifically France in the later half of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century in which the story is set) is also not a place untouched by the desolating 'storms of power' (*RF*, p. 43). She begins to understand that the dark walls of the convent mark off a space resonant with the 'sullen miseries of its votaries' (*RF*, p. 45) and are emblematic of the economic and political structure of the society of which the church is a part. She is shocked into an awareness of the fact that in the convent as in the social world, graciousness of manners often veils a depraved heart, and 'marks of kindness' often disguise 'features of distrust' (*RF*, p. 60). She learns that in the present ethical condition of society the impulse to control and subjugate others is aided by sordid self-interest, passion is uncontrolled by reason, and feelings are without any moral principle, and that even an honest person can be betrayed into the 'dangerous labyrinth' (*RF*, p. 247) of deception, misery and crime. That is why the gloomy convent, the ruined abbey and the haunted forest become for her adequate images of a world hostile to virtue.

After her release from the convent, Adeline is abducted by bandits. Eventually she finds refuge in the forest of Fontanville. At first the forest and the dark tower of an Abbey rising above the trees fill her with astonishment and relief. She thinks of the forest with the Abbey as a sweetly romantic place—'a forest of liberty'—where some 'wretched wanderer' could find 'refuge from a persecuting world' (*RF*, pp. 29-30). But soon the agreeableness of the wild and picturesque landscape is denied and contradicted.⁴⁵ Adeline is told that the Abbey and the forest were sites of gruesome murders. Instead of being auspicious places, as she had hoped, they become for her regions of terror where 'exquisite tortures' (*RF*, p. 141) are devised to compel her to submit to the Marquis de Montalt. Thus, the actuality of experience destroys, just as it had infected the religious aura of the convent, the dream-like quality of her place of refuge and transforms it into an abominable space. It is here then that the brutal drama of dominance and submission, of violent eroticism and cynical degradation, is enacted. Not surprisingly, Adeline comes to regard the Abbey as 'the mansion of despair' (*RF*, p. 80) and the forest as a 'polluted spot' (*RF*, p. 407).

Similarly, in *The Italian* ruined monasteries, sepulchral vaults of the Inquisition and sad convents are particular symbols of cruel power and avarice.

evil into a holy order resembling the pattern of the Gothic cathedral. Therefore, the space of the Gothic cathedral where humane discourse is possible and where the sacred is made manifest, cannot be the site for the performance of the abominable actions of the Gothic novel. Instead, it is the ruin which appropriately provides the Gothic novelist with a symbol of an age which cannot discover the ethical or religious conditions necessary for the making of a good society.

II •

In Mrs Radcliffe's novels, for instance, ruined abbeys, 'light shunning'³⁹ castles, dark-granite monasteries are visible symbols and appropriate sites of demonic power and rituals. She does not employ these images, as Sir Walter Scott asserts, to create a mysterious 'fairy land' far removed from 'the region of reality' and untainted by 'human passions'⁴⁰. These images do not invite us to wander off into some remote enchantment far from the parasitic luxuriousness of the 'cities, the hopeless labour in villages, the bitterness of the human heart 'corroded by its own suffering',⁴¹ or the 'mortuary prosecutions'⁴² of an Inquisitional church. Instead, images of ruins and gloomy monasteries make a socially specific critique of the 'cruelty and oppression' (*I*, p. 85) of the church and of the 'callous insensibility' (*I*, p. 111) of the hierarchical civil order. This assertion that Mrs. Radcliffe's novels recognize the relationship between the church, which no longer affirms an enduring sacred totality, and a capricious and a violent society of which it is a part, should become clear in the following analysis of the images of ruined abbeys, castles and convents in *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian*.

Adeline, the heroine of *The Romance of the Forest*, has her first experience of life's depravity in the convent where she has been 'immured'⁴³ by her supposed father. The convent is for her neither an 'asylum and safe refuge from the storm of power' (*RF*, p. 43) nor a benevolent place where people in 'the rapturous delights of religion' (*RF*, p. 46) and mutual human affection work for the realization of a good community. She regards it with 'horror and disgust' (*RF*, p. 45) as a prison where 'cruelty and superstition' (*RF*, p. 46) masquerade as charity and piety. Its novices know more about the terrors of punishment than about 'holy innocence' or 'mild dignity' (*RF*, p. 48). Like many other Gothic heroes and heroines,⁴⁴ she is convinced that the convent is an infected place which destroys the ordinary social and moral confidence of people:

... at length the horrors of the monastic life rose so fully to my view that fortitude gave way before them. Excluded from the cheerful inter course of society— from the light of day— - condemned to nature— almost from the pleasant view of silence— rigid formality— abstinence and penance— - condemned to forego the

both a part of a malignant society, as well as an essential image of the hellish dreams that torment the man's soul.

The relation between the corrupt church, the polluted landscape which surrounds it and an oppressive society is more fully realized in the rest of the novel. For example, in the sections following Ellena's abduction to the convent of San Stephano, Mrs Radcliffe gives dramatically effective expression to those infernal forces in the society which seek total control over their victims. Ellena is forced into making a demonic pilgrimage which ends, not as religious pilgrimages do in *communitas*, but in isolation and imprisonment in a convent. Unlike a sacred journey in which the landscape is changed with 'cosmological and theological meaning',⁴⁷ the journey which Ellena is forced to undertake is along a path bristling with terror. Driven across a rude, wild plain enclosed by rocks and woods, she feels as if she is 'going forth into a new and homeless world' (*I*, p. 60). This desolate landscape becomes a part of the human and social spectacle when Ellena sees the people who inhabit it and realize that they are, like the harsh mountains, pitiless and predatory.⁴⁸ She is then taken across a defile of stones into a mountain region which is more solitary and rough than the plains she had crossed. The road is suspended across an awful precipice. Thundering below it is a river which throws up a wild mist of spray. Not surprisingly, Ellena thinks of her journey as a passage through the vale of death (*I*, p. 64). Once across it she experiences only a momentary respite from the forces which control her.

Meek as 'a lamb to the sacrifice', (*I*, p. 62) she is taken by her captors to a cathedral. The first sight of the cathedral spires, the adjoining convent, the unsurmountable walls and the huge gates fill her with apprehension of 'future suffering' (*I*, p. 64). She thinks of them as grotesque places where each inhabitant seems ready to 'inflict upon others the same portion of the unhappiness [they themselves] suffered' (*I*, p. 66). Her presentiment of evil is fulfilled when she meets the nuns who conduct her across the cathedral courts. As she watches the 'malignant envy' (*I*, p. 68) that shades their faces, she realizes that she is in a place where all creative and religious vitality is denied and the individual is forced to conform to the interests of an institution built on violence, superstition and bigotry.

The Abbess is, as Ellena suspects, an agent of a social and religious order which is, in spite of its pretensions of generosity, unjust and tyrannical. She tells Ellena that her desire to marry Vivaldi, her social superior, is a crime surpassed only by sacrilege. Ellena is offered two choices, both of which are humiliating. She must either become a nun, or accept in marriage a person 'whom the Marchesa di Vivaldi had, of her great goodness, selected for her husband' (*I*, p. 83). Indignantly rejecting the alternatives, at the risk of harsh punishment, she condemns the Abbess and the church as demonic :

They are profaned spots suggesting the presence of some evil magician, who has the 'power to change the fairest scenes into those of gloom and desolation' (*I*, p. 291). Conveniently secluded and forbidden, they are places which have awfulness attached to them; they are secret sites where sadistic priests can lacerate the body, inflict upon it every kind of pain that their subtlety can device, till men are so baffled by their torment that they will affirm anything, acquiesce to anything. That is why they are an effective part of Mrs Radcliffe's funerary world — dominated by crazed aristocrats, corrupt clergymen, vicious and irrational members of the Inquisition, all preoccupied with the ceremonial of suffering and torture.

From the very opening of the novel it is apparent that all its actions take place in demonic space — that is, take place within a historically specific society where people are robbed of their capacities for meaningful religious or social gestures, and where men of property and power, for cynical self-gratification, violate all laws consistent with the dignity of human beings. In surprising conformity with the available accounts of Naples in the eighteenth century,⁴⁶ we are told that it is a city controlled by hired bravos (*I*, p. 15) and a place where 'assassinations are ... frequent' (*I*, p. 3). Its system of civil law is in the hands of a few families and the rich clergy who look after their spiritual lives. Instead of being tempered with mercy, civil law is structured to benefit the rich and to preserve the power of the aristocrats. One of the characters in the novel says 'Well! The rich have this comfort, however, that let them be ever so guilty, they can buy themselves innocence again, in the twinkling of a ducat. Now a poor man might be a month before he recovered his innocence, and that, too, not till after many a bout of hard flogging' (*I*, p. 166). That the church is a part of the structures of power is confirmed when the Abbess of the convent, to which Ellena is abducted, says 'that of all possible crimes, next to that of sacrilege, offences against persons of rank were least pardonable' (*I*, p. 67, also see pp. 83-84, 110, 166). In the novel religious law, like civil law, is ideological in nature and its Inquisitional fires, like the gallows, are a part of the terrible rituals of submission and predatory control, of violations of the body and lawless power.

The Italian opens with an English traveller who, while visiting the *Santa Maria del Pianto* in 1764, an ancient church of the order of the Black Penitents, sees a mysterious man muffled by the 'terrible shadows' (*I*, p. 58) cast by the broken walls of the cathedral. The man looks 'like some supernatural messenger of evil' (*I*, p. 50). Dressed like a monk, he has a 'shallow complexion', hard features, and his eyes are expressive of 'uncommon ferocity' (*I*, p. 1). Like the shattered walls of the church, the man seems to be irredeemably lost in his despair. The church offers him no consolation, promises no relief, but carries 'hints of future suffering' (*I*, p. 64). To the Englishman the church seems to be

prerogative of reason, and boasting of his sense of justice, to unite the most terrible extremes of folly and wickedness!' (I, p. 198, also see pp. 200-1.)⁵³

In these scenes Mrs Radcliffe attempts to confront, with honesty and moral courage, the conflicts in a corrupt society. In the novel the conflicts remain unresolved. The marriage of Ellena to Vivaldi and the conventional assertion that virtuous and rational men would triumph over all the machinations of the perverted appear to be nothing more than commonplace devices for rounding off the novel. The reaffirmation of faith in a benevolent order at the end lacks conviction, because the social and religious structure which caused so much suffering remains; its machinery of torture is not destroyed. The novel's vast and intricate pattern of pain is not dispelled by the ritual dance of the simple rustics under the moonlight and Paulo's silly moral sermon delivered at the end. In the novel the world is not healed again.⁵⁴

In Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* monasteries, 'sepulchral ruins' (M, p. 166) of cathedrals, and the social and natural world within which they are located, are charged with 'malignant and mysterious potency'.⁵⁵ Ecclesiastical authority, supported by military and civil power, is always seen in the novel as a violation, or rather, an abomination of the laws of reason and humanity.⁵⁶ The church is neither a place to which men can escape from the 'indignity' (M, p. 96) heaped upon them in a society of inequalities, nor is it a consecrated space of refuge from the 'filth and famine' (M, p. 22) of the cities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rather, it is a place of terror where each day witnesses some new 'spectacle of horror and cruelty' (M, p. 83); an area 'saturated with cruelty and blood' (M, p. 196); a place of 'horrid profanation' (M, p. 184). Instead of commemorating a holy space where human actions are governed by principles of mercy, social justice and selfless love, it is a desecrated space where every gesture carries hints of 'the power, and crime, and gloom of the human mind' (M, p. 186). In the novel the church is a horrible contradiction of the luminosity, the peace and the sacred orientation of the original Gothic cathedrals.

Thus, for example, in the 'Tale of the Spaniard' the church is a ruthless and an arrogant institution shaping the social and economic structure of eighteenth century Spain. Alonzo Moncada is an illegitimate child who is offered as an atonement to the monastery and is later forced to take religious orders. Since he is from an aristocratic family, the monks see his placement in their order as an important political victory for the church (M, p. 70). It is not surprising that Alonzo thinks that 'all Spain is one great monastery' (M, p. 143; also see p. 140) from which there is no possibility of escape, and sees himself as a 'victim' (M, pp. 70-74) of the predatory political and economic programme of the Church and the State. He realizes that religion is a part of the cultural and political

'The sanctuary is profaned', said Ellena, mildly, but with dignity, 'it is become a prison. It is only when the Superior ceases to respect the precepts of that holy religion, the precepts which teach her justice and benevolence, that she herself is no longer respected. The very sentiment which bids us reverse its mild and beneficent laws, bids us also to reject the violators of them; when you command me to reverence my religion, you urge me to condemn yourself.' (*I*, pp. 84-85)

It is obvious that the church and the Abbess represent the corruption of religious law, just as the Marchesa and the city of Naples represent the 'cruelty and oppression' of the civil law.

Soon, however, Ellena is rescued by Vivaldi and they decide to get married in defiance of social customs and the directives of the church. But the marriage ceremony, instead of sanctifying a new beginning, turns into a demonic ritual promising more pain and suffering. On the evening of the marriage everything seems charged with 'melancholy foreboding' (*I*, p. 183) and agitated by some preternatural power. Ellena thinks that every object in the twilight is 'portentious of future misfortune' (*I*, p. 184). And when she sees some 'mournful' cypresses near the chapel she imagines them to be 'funeral mementoes — not such as should grace the altar of marriage!' (*I*, p. 184). The chapel itself, lit by 'a kind of gloomy sepulchral light' appears to be filled with strange spectral apparitions (*I*, p. 184). Before the ceremony is over, it is invaded by men whose strange dresses and fierce visages, seen in the glare of flickering torches, convince Ellena they are Satanic beings who bring terrible messages of evil. They turn out to be the officers of the Holy Inquisition.⁴⁹

Judging from the descriptions of the torture chambers and the prisoners that follow, it is certain that Mrs Radcliffe thought of the Inquisition as an instrument of fiendish persecution and an 'integral part of the social edifice in every city and every state' in Europe.⁵⁰ Reminiscent of the gory drawings of Piranesi or Magnasco,⁵¹ they offer the novel's finest images of horror. In the Inquisitional chambers religious faith is reinforced by the infliction of pain; cruel tortures are made essential parts of the ceremonial reaffirmation of orthodoxy.⁵² The faces of his captors 'stamped with the characters of demons' (*I*, p. 197) and the half-stifled groans of the prisoners, fill Vivaldi with horror:

'Is this possible ! ... Can this be in human nature ! — can such horrible perversion of right be permitted ! Can man, who calls himself endowed with reason, and immeasurably superior to every other created being, argue himself into the commission of such horrible folly, such inveterate cruelty, as exceeds all the acts of the most irrational and ferocious brute. Brutes do not deliberately slaughter their species; it remains for man only, man, proud of his

read of a wretched Jew, who, by the command of a Moorish emperor, was exposed in an area to the rage of a lion who had been purposely kept fasting for eight and forty hours. ... Amid hopeless struggles, supplications for mercy, and shrieks of despair, he was bound, raised, and lowered into the area. At the moment he touched the ground, he fell prostrate, stupefied, annihilated. ... So it fared with me; my cries and struggles were over — I had been flung into the area, and I lay there ... I repeated to myself, 'I am to be a monk,' and there the debate ended. (*M*, p. 70, see also p. 72, and 85-87.)

Here there is no mystical apprehension of the 'awful majesty' (Rudolf Otto's phrase) of the Divine. Indeed, in the entire novel there is an utter sense of despair, for neither in the creative imagination nor in the social and political structure lies the possibility of discovering that charm or spell which would transform the world — the 'dream of insanity' (*M*, p. 363) remains.

The idea that the Gothic ruin is a 'place where putrefaction occurs' and a 'place where perdition occurs' (Octavio Paz's phrases), is most harrowingly realized in the scene in which Immalee's marriage to Melmoth is described. The marriage ritual, performed in a dark ruin, doesn't signify the renunciation of Selfhood (Shelley's 'dark idolatry of self') or a radicalypic transformation of the social and political order.⁵⁸ The journey which Immalee and Melmoth undertake at night to the ruined chapel is a demonic parody of the sacred rites of passage resulting in religious *askesis*. The path of their 'shadowy journey' (*M*, p. 300) towards the altar is not, as in religious rites, consecrated by ceremonial objects and liturgical symbols like holy stones, relics, or images of saints, but is surrounded, as in a forbidden magical site, by objects and symbols of dread and abomination.⁵⁹ It is a 'fearful night' during which Immalee is borne across a 'dreary and strange' land as if by 'supernatural' powers (*M*, p. 296). The stream is filled with 'menacing' voices; the sky, torn by 'a pale, meteoric lightning', seems to 'unite the mingled evils of the various seasons' (*M*, p. 295), and the 'loneliness' of the region carries warnings of 'something almost awful' (*M*, p. 296).

This 'painful pilgrimage' (*M*, p. 277) ends in a ruined monastery. Its past history and its present spectral shape signify the overwhelming distance separating it from its original ceremonial purpose. There is nothing left of its sacralty and of 'the rude work of the first hands' (*M*, p. 302).⁶⁰ Instead, it is a sepulchral place of unholy rites, of sadism, of ceremonies of blood and of fearfully acquired gold. It manifests both the agony of man as he abandons his dreams of imaginative fullness and longs for death, and the monstrous condition of the human and social world in which he acts.

It was said the Superior ... had looked into certain books, the perusal of which was not ... sanctioned by the rules of the order

ideology of the society and that church rituals, which are often enforced through terror, are nothing but bloody codes of behaviour designed to protect and legitimize property interests and class power. The ideological nature of the Church becomes evident when he learns that punishments given out to the sons of the rich for violating monastic rules differ from those which other monks are forced to endure :

Some one ... had committed a slight breach of monastic duty. The *slight breach* was *fortunately* committed by a distant relation of the Archbishop of Toledo, and consisted *merely in his entering the church intoxicated* ... attempting to drag the matin preacher from the pulpit, and failing in that, getting astride as well as he could on the altar, dashing down the tapers, ... and trying to scratch out, as with the talons of a demon, the painting that hung over the table, uttering all the while the most horrible blasphemies, and even *soliciting the portrait of the Virgin* in language not to be repeated. ... There was much talk of the inquisition— and scandal was so atrocious,— the outrage so unpardonable,---- and the atonement so impracticable. Three days afterwards the Archbishop's mandate came to stop all proceedings ... (*M*, p. 81; Maturin's italics.)

In contrast, a monk with less exalted connections is, for an act which is humane and compassionate and, at the same time a violation of the commands of the Superior, lashed into delirium (*M*, pp. 82-83).

Alonzo's requests for release from the monastery are rejected; his attempts to escape from it are foiled. Unconsoled and without hope, he begins to make Piranesi-like sketches of monasteries and dungeons (*M*, p. 72). He begins to think of the daily brutalities of monastic ritual, in which he is doomed to participate, as a mad 'festival of insanity' (*M*, p. 39). For Alonzo, the church, defended by Inquisitional fires, doesn't offer any understanding of man's potential for goodness, nor does his suffering provide, as some critics have insisted, 'an understanding of the profoundest source of actual cosmic fear'.⁵⁷ Rather, the church is, like the society, a place of hopeless suffering; a place where shameless men use religious idealism to mask their rapine and their greed; where they gratify their need for power by coercing their victims, through torture and terror, to participate in some daily 'masquerade of death' (*M*, p. 87). The following passage offers an instance of the relationship between the church and the atrocious civil society of which it is a part :

... I was like one who sees an enormous engine (whose operation is to crush him to atoms) put into motion, and, stupefied with horror, gazes on it with a calmness that might be mistaken for that of one who was coolly analysing the complication of its machinery, and calculating the resistless crush of its blow. I have

springing with her upon the altar tortured her with his odious caresses. . . . Instantly the cathedral seemed crumbling into pieces. . . . the lamps were extinguished, the altar sunk down, and in its place appeared an abyss vomiting forth clouds of flame. Uttering a loud and terrible cry the monster plunged into the gulph, and in his fall attempted to drag Antonia with him. (*Monk*, p. 53)

As the novel progresses, the church becomes the centre of madness and disease; the ancient hierophantic space is transformed into an area where, instead of mystery, there is nothing but the spectacle of 'disgust, vice, dissipation' (*Monk*, p. 83). Similarly, in another set of events in the novel, Agnes de Medina, discovers that religious rituals and symbols in a convent merely disguise laws of privilege and power. The convent, she discovers, does not establish conditions of justice and reason, but of irresponsible power, demanding abject surrender from those who are fooled by its mask of virtue and charity. She tries to break out of its petrifyingly strict moral laws only to find herself more cruelly trapped in its nightmare and its loathsomeness. The following passage, which many critics find disgusting,⁶³ describing her immurement in the convent's prison makes it unambiguously clear that in the novel religious law and the church of the times are defilements of everything that promises vitality and joy.

The cold seemed more piercing and bitter, the air more thick and pestilential. My frame became weak, feverish, and emaciated. I was unable to rise from the bed of straw, and exercise my limbs in the narrow limits to which the length of my chain permitted me to move. . . . My slumbers were constantly interrupted by some obnoxious insect crawling over me. Sometimes I felt the bloated toad, hideous and pampered with the poisonous vapours of the dungeon, dragging his loathsome length along my bosom. Sometimes the quick cold lizard roused me, leaving his slimy track upon my face, and entangling itself in the tresses of my wild and matted hair. Often have I at waking found my finger ringed with the long worms which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infant. At such times I shrieked with terror and disgust; and, while I shook off the reptile, trembled with all a woman's weakness. (*Monk*, pp. 395-96) •

This description, apart from the final genteel phrase, hardly suggests a mind that seeks refuge from evil which is recognizably human and social in some sentimental fantasy about a world suffused with the Divine. The bodily decay, the instruments of torture, the deliberately inflicted pain, and the actuality of suffering does not permit such relief. Lewis, like the other Gothicists, recognizes that 'Want and misery are not naturally fertile in the production of imagination--- they grasp at realities too closely' (*M*, p. 326). The church with its prisons and its malevolent priests is, then, not a place of illumination. It is •

books of magic they called them. There was much noise about it. I remember, and some talk of the Inquisition — but the end of the business was, the Prior disappeared, some said into safer custody — (though how that could be, I cannot well conceive)... There were some offers made for it by the communities of other religious houses, but the evil ... that had gone forth about it, deterred them, on inquiry, from inhabiting it, — and gradually the building fell to ruin. It still retains all that can sanctify it in the eyes of the faithful. There are crucifixes and tomb-stones, and here and there a cross set up where there has been murder, — for, by a singular congeniality of taste, a banditti has fixed their seat there now, — and the traffic of gold, for souls, once carried on so profitably by the former inmates, is exchanged for that of souls for gold, by the present. (*M*, p. 297)

It is in such a spot, then, with its history of evil, that the preternatural marriage is celebrated. The ritual is performed by the ghost of a hermit who had died the previous night. The ruined chapel is an appropriate site for such an awesome ceremony which results in the abject surrender of all humanizing visions. Immalce finds herself in the dungeons of the Inquisition; Melmoth remains transfixed in his 'deadly and desparate' purpose, often seeming to others, in his quest for death, 'like a Harlequin in the infernal regions, flirting with the furies ...' (*M*, p. 390); and, the religious, social and political world continues with its senseless acts governed by 'inexhaustible malignity and hostility' (*M*, p. 236).

Similarly, in M.G. Lewis' *The Monk* the church, the monastic ruin, the convent with its labyrinthine passages are not places of humility, veneration or kind refuge, but are doomed spaces penetrated with real and supernatural horror. They are not only without reason or lucidity, but are nightmare places of silence and sterility of shadows and dark deeds, of bones and worms. Thus, in the wild dream which Lorenzo has when he falls asleep in 'the Gothic obscurity of the church',⁶¹ the cathedral is a strange surreal place.⁶² At first, Lorenzo thinks that the cathedral is filled with holiness and light, but as he advances to take Antonia as his bride, the scene suddenly changes. The cathedral becomes a place, not of weddings, but ruination; a place of demonic intrusion and of predatory sexuality :

She ... hastened to throw herself into his arms; but before he had time to receive her an unknown rushed between them : his form was gigantic; his complexion was swarthy, his eyes fierce and terrible; his mouth breathed out volumes of fire, and on his forehead was written in legible characters— 'Pride ! Lust ! Inhumanity !' Antonia shrieked. The monster clamped her in his arms, and

terrible and excruciating death. Anna is taken to the dungeons of the Abbey and left to starve to death. In the following description of Anna's incarceration religious objects are employed to evoke dreadful apprehensions of the Satanic :

At the hour of midnight they dragged the miserable victim from her cell, and deep, in the horrible dungeons, of the prison, plunged the distracted Nun ! -- Groans, sighs, and shrieks alternately rung echoing round the rugged walls; the torturing horrors of famine awaited the unfortunate Nun; no pity alleviated her misery, and in the centre of the place stood the coffin destined for her, whilst round the walls and floor, in all directions, were strewn the ghastly ensigns of woe and torment. A faint lamp, suspended from the massy bars of the roof ... served to shew her the horrors that overwhelmed her ... Shrieks of despair rang through the building, and echoed to the vaults of heaven. — Hark ! again that soul-appalling cry ! — Inhuman fiends, is mercy dead within you ? --- is there no touch of pity in your obdurate souls ? ... Again she shrieks — sure it is her last ! — The holy sisterhood, appalled, the mercy of their superiors for its dying inmate. — Nature is exhausted, and hark again the groans grow fainter ! (*AR*, I, 299-302).

To add to the brutal irony of Anna's fate, Lord Oswythe turns out to be the stranger Vortimer.

Anna's story is an echo of the tale of her parents, Matilda and Sir Alfred. Matilda too is a victim of her father's tyranny and the vampirish zeal of her austere confessor. While she falls in love with Alfred and marries him, she also manages to inflame the passions of his cruel elder brother, Rudolf. It is now that their terror begins: Matilda is dragged away to the same ruined Abbey where Anna would die such a miserable death. There, with the blessings of Father Vincentio — 'the fiend of darkness' (*AR*, III, 267) — Rudolf rapes her. Once again the church becomes a place of awfulness where innocence is forced to 'yield to pollution and dishonour' (*AR*, III, p. 96). In the ruin is figured the depravity of the religious and social order as well as the nightmare of the soul the soul bewildered and exhausted by its unnecessary suffering.

I hope it is evident from this brief analysis of a few of the popular works of the genre that in the Gothic novel the ruined cathedral, the broken Abbey, the ivy covered towers of a convent, the subterranean passages of a crumbling ancient castle, or the moon-haunted house, are not simple picturesque places in a strange landscape, but are centres of demonic activity. In the Gothic novel, they are not sanctuaries for holy power — they are not places where life is perpetually consecrated or replenished. Rather, they are places where one becomes aware of the presence of demonic powers which have invaded and

a space in historical time where there occurs a barbaric outrage of the human body; a place which deranges all ideals of a human culture and an equitable society.

Nor does the church become, at the end of the novel, a site for 'springtime communion' (Octavio Paz's phrase), as some critics, concerned with its religious meanings, assert. Since, in the novel, evil is so insistently a product of human actions and not of some metaphysical flaw,⁶⁴ and since the civil society, of which religion is a part, remains throughout 'the theatre of the most unbridled debauchery' (*M*, p. 182), there is no possibility of the transformation of the predatory nature of the church. 'In a world so bare, so perfidious and depraved' (*M*, p. 277), the church cannot regain its past coherence and become the centre of grace and an enclosure of holy power. Lewis' novel does not promise such redemption. In the final horrible seduction scene amidst the decaying bones in the secret tombs beneath the church altar, and in the scenes of torture, the cathedral space gives external and dramatic expression to all the pestilential energies that seem to have acquired control over human beings.

Even minor Gothic novelists use the imagery of the ruin as a source of horror—for them too the ruin is a place where ruthless human beings exercise absolute control over their victims. The ruined Abbey in T.J. Horsley Curties's *Ancient Records, or the Abbey of Saint Oswythe*, for example, evokes 'appalling ideas of dreadful deeds'⁶⁵ performed by the nobility and a servile clergy. It is a demonic mirror-image of the ancient shrine which is no longer consecrated against evil men or preternatural powers; a blighted place where innocent victims are brought 'to be immolated at the shrine of avarice and sordid interest' (*AR*, II, p. 189). Its old keeper is convinced that 'Satan and his dark agents abide there' (*AR*, I, 86) and that gruesome heads fly over the Abbey on moonlit nights and leave behind a trail of blood.

That the ruined Abbey is a place of demonic rituals can be seen in a nun's story recorded in a mouldering manuscript ('these appalling documents of misery', *AR*, I, 302-03).⁶⁶ A proud and lonely nobleman, Sir Ermanfred, in the hope of regaining his wealth, decides to marry off his only daughter Anna to Lord Osmond. She, unfortunately, loves a stranger named Vortimer and has secretly married him 'in the ruined chapel of Sir Ermanfred's gloomy edifice' (*AR*, I, 277). Her problem is resolved temporarily when she finds refuge in a monastery. There, however, she is betrayed by her confessor and is forced to take the veil. The monastery, thus, becomes a prison and she a 'victim of bigotry and paternal tyranny' (*AR*, I, 289). Soon after taking her vows, she gives birth to a child. The rumour that a nun had sullied her sanctity and profaned her most sacred vows, reaches the rich and rapacious patron of the Abbey, Lord Oswythe, who demands money from the Abbess for his silence. He, thus, forces her to sentence Anna, as a 'heinous apostate' (*AR*, I, 297), to the most

in the *Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (1950; rpt. London and New York : Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 11.

11 For details see my thesis *The Shades of the Preternatural : Structural and Thematic Essays on the Gothic Novel*. Dis., Kent State University, 1973.

12 See Eliade *The Sacred and the Profane*; and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger : An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966; rpt. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1970).

13 John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture* (New York : Charles Scribner, 1948), p. 9. Also see Wilhelm Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, trans. Herbert Read (1957; rpt. New York : Schocken, 1964).

14 Summerson, p. 13. The note of 'fantasy' in the Gothic, he says, was borrowed from Arabic art.

15 G. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J.E. Turner (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 267.

16 Reprinted in John Harvey, *The Medieval Architect* (London : Wayland Publishers, 1972), p. 237.

17 Male, *The Gothic Image*, p. 4.

18 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 23.

19 Ed. Theodore Bowie (Bloomington and London : Indiana University Press, 1959).

20 Abbot Suger on *The Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Art Treasures*, ed. and trans. Edwin Panofsky, (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 63. For St. Bernard's attack on Suger see Harvey, *The Medieval Architect*, pp. 223-25.

21 The Romantics were not concerned with the Gothic cathedral as a historical model of the middle ages. They were aware of the horrors of feudalism and the Inquisition, and were not nostalgic about the past. The Gothic cathedral was, instead, a model for Ideal Values — it provided a structure of reference. See Brain Stock, 'The Middle Ages as Subject and Object : Romantic Attitudes and Academic Medievalism', *New Literary History*, 5 (1973-74), 527-47. For a harsh economic analysis of English monasteries see G.G. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies* (1930; rpt. Gloucester : Peter Smith, 1967).

22 'On Virgil', *Blake : Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 778.

23 Wordsworth : *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 589.

24 Coleridge's *Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 7 and p. 11-12.

25 For eighteenth century prejudices see A.E. Longueil, 'The Word "Gothic" in Eighteenth-Century Criticism', *Modern Language Notes*, 38 (1923), 453-60; and Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* (1962, rpt. New York : Harper and Row, 1974).

26 Quoted by Nicolas Pevsner, *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design* (New York : Walker, 1968), I, 166.

27 For details see Paul Frankl, *The Gothic : Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1960); and Georg Hermann, *Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain : Sources, Influences, and Ideas*, trans.

infected our lives. Their central presence in the novel helps one to understand that the Gothic novelist, like the Romantic poet, sees himself as a participant in a long journey towards self-knowledge and as a quester in search of a humane social order. They also help one to understand that, unlike the quest of the Romantic poet, the agonized search of the Gothicism for the marvellous and mysterious sources of creative energy or for ways of crafting a good society ends in failure. The self in the Gothic novel, does not recover its lost sense of wholeness; does not emerge from its ordeal purified and renewed. At the end, the Gothic novel affirms nothing — neither family affections nor communities, neither friendships nor traditions, neither the goodness of the earth nor the goodness of man which can provide the ground for hope or faith. Indeed, one can assert that the Gothic novel enacts demonic rituals of failure and misery, disintegration and waste; that it offers us histories of victims and victimizers, and prophecies that they will be repeated again and again without an end till madness or death have mercy upon us all.

NOTES

1 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Religion', in *The Institutions of Primitive Society : A Series of Broadcast Talks*, ed. Raymond Firth et al (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1967).

2 See H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, ed. E.F. Bleiler (1945; rpt. New York : Dover, 1973); Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (1957; rpt. New York : Russell and Russell, 1966); S.L. Varnada, 'The idea of the Numinous in Gothic Literature', in *The Gothic Imagination : Essays in Dark Romanticism*, ed. A.R. Thompson (Washington : Washington State University Press, 1974).

3 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane : The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York : Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 156.

4 On millennialist fantasies of landless labourers and poor farmers see my article 'Plains of Darkness : The Gothic Novel and the Pastoral Myth', *Journal of Peasant Studies* (1986).

5 *The Gothic Flame*, p. 212.

6 See Stephen Feuchtwang, 'Investigating Religion', in *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology*, ed. Maurice Bloch (New York : John Wiley, 1975); and Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, trans. Robert Brain (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 169-85.

7 Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (New York : Norton, 1975), pp. 8-9; also see Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (New York : Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 35-36.

8 *The Gothic Flame*, pp. 206-31.

9 Emile Male, *The Gothic Image : Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey (New York : Harper and Row, 1958), p. 1.

10 Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor*

Selections from the British Folklorists, ed. Richard M. Dorson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), I, 10-11; Blake's painting for Europe, plate 11 (1794), showing King George as a spectre bat, wearing robes that look like a cathedral door and a crown shaped like the papal tiara, *The Illuminated Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Anchor, 1974), p. 169; S.T. Coleridge, 'On the Present War', in *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 51-74; John Wade, *The Extraordinary Black Book* (1831; rpt. Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), p. 223. For a summary of anti-catholic remarks see Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

45 For a different reading of these novels see H.N. Fairchild, *The Romantic Quest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), J.M.S. Tomkins, *The Popular Novels in England: 1770-1800* (1932; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (1957); Elizabeth MacAndrews, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*; (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

46 See Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life: 1400-1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Harper & Row, 1937). Naples in the eighteenth century was both 'sordid and beautiful, abjectly poor and very rich ...' on the one hand were 'courtiers, greatland nobility, high-ranking ecclesiastics, dishonest officials, judges, advocates, and litigants', and on the other, were the 'totally deprived mass' of the 'ragged poor' numbering about 100,000. The church in 1793 'owned at the lowest estimate two-thirds of the landed property in the Kingdom, the nobility two-ninths.' (pp. 416-18). Further, there 'justice was bought and sold' (p. 417).

47 Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 210.

48 H.R. Trevor-Roper in *The European Witch-Craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) argues for a close relationship between mountain landscapes and beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery.

49 Mrs Radcliffe makes a fine use of candle-light in the scene. Here faces acquire demonic fierceness precisely because they are not seen in the reassuring and bright light of the day; the shifting play of light and the deep shadows of the church add to the horror of the scene. The scene's organization reminds one of Joseph Wright of Derby's candle-light studies. See Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, ed. and revised by Arthur Elton (1947; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), p. 54. Mrs Radcliffe may have known Wright's work.

50 Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, p. 88.

51 On Piranesi's Carceri and the Romantics see Jonathan Scott, *Piranesi* (London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), pp. 54-57. Magnasco painted emaciated hermits, debauched nuns and bodies torn by instruments of torture. See William Gaunt, *Haunts in a Landscape* (London: The Studio Publications, 1937).

52 On torture see V.G. Kiernan, 'The Politics of Pain', *The Nation*, 4 Jan., 1971, pp. 8-14. Also see Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism* (1951, rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1968) and Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (1962, rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

53 Lea in *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* says that torture was one of 'the darkest and most repulsive aspects' of the Inquisition (p. 167).

Gerald Onn (Cambridge, Mass. : The MIT Press, 1973).

28 *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1938; rpt. New York : Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 407.

29 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 87.

30 See Paul Zucker, *Fascination of Decay : Ruins : Relic-Symbol-Ornament* (Ridgewood, New Jersey : Gregg Press, 1963), pp. 5-17; and Rose Macaulay, *The Pleasure of Ruins* (London : Thames and Hudson, 1977).

31 G. Van Der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty : The Holy in Art*, trans. David E. Green (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 195.

32 See Thomas MacFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin : Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1981).

33 S.T. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York : Pantheon, 1957) Text, I, 272.

34 Marcel Mauss and H. Herbert quoted by Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 88.

35 Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, ed. William F. Axton (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1961). Hereafter referred to as *M*.

36 See Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors : Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1974).

37 S.T. Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), I, 410.

38 Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries : The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York : Harper and Row, 1967), p. 17.

39 Phrase taken from M.G. Lewis, 'Osiric the Lion', in *Tales of Wonder* (London : J. Bell, 1801), I, II.

40 *On Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Joan Williams (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 119.

41 Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents : A Romance*, ed. Frederick Garber (London and New York : Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 85. Hereafter referred to as *I*.

42 H.C. Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages : Its Organization and Operation* (New York : Harper and Row, 1963), p. 157.

43 *The Romance of the Forest* (London : George Routledge, 1904), p. 45. Hereafter referred to as *RF*.

44 For the use of church rituals see Sister Mary Muriel Tarr, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction : A Study of the Nature and Function of Catholic Materials in Gothic Fiction in England (1772-1820)*, Diss., The Catholic University of America (Washington D.C. : The Catholic University of America Press, 1946). This work takes a point of view different from mine.

Remarks against monasteries and convents can be found in abundance in other writings of the period. For example, J. and A.I. Aiken, 'On Monastic Institutions', in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (2nd. ed., London : J. Johnson, 1775), John Brand, 'Observations on Popular Antiquities (1777)', in *Poems, Customs and Savage Myths :*

STRUCTURING FORCES IN THE EMERGENCE OF A GENRE : THE NOVEL IN BENGAL

Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta

'The evolution of literature cannot be understood until the evolutionary process ceases to be obscured by questions about episodic non-systemic genesis, whether literary (for example, so called literary influences) or extraliterary', write Tynjanov and Jakobson.¹ The immanent laws and tendencies of the history of literature, they rightly suggest, determine the character of each specific change in literary systems. But the literary system is also linked with other systems in complex and multiple ways, each system being both autonomous and heteronomous. Thus literary evolution or change is determined by interliterary factors as well as by surrounding historical, social and other systems. This particular point of view finds expression in critical texts on the novel in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Bengal and it is this reception that determines the premise of our argument. A horizon of expectations is etched out in these texts which at once shape and is shaped by the emerging literary product.

The idea of the novel is quite protean in many of the early critical texts, the word 'upanyas' (novel) being used interchangeably with many other words denoting other modes of writing. There is a consciousness of its Western links, but also of the Arabic-Persian tradition. However, two very striking perspectives that one encounters in these texts are notions of 'kavya' or poetic literature and the application of the poetics of kavya to the novel on the one hand, and by a hard core didacticism on the other. The novelist is often referred to as poet (kavi) and his work as 'kavya'. As a poet again he is equated to the 'seer or prophet who enters the world of reality, realizes the eternal permanent entity within its external, untrue, changing, destructive shape and loses himself in its wealth of beauty. It is of that yogic state, that state of 'sadhana' that art or poetry is born which sees into the soul, the eternal strength and power that lies there.'² The author Debendrabijoy Basu further asserts that if a novel is rich in other substances and does not have this essence of art it is not a novel. One can unmistakably trace the concepts above to ancient Indian poetics as well as to the Indian philosophic systems, although in a simplified form and the simplification may well be the result of an attempt to apply a system of rhetoric to a corpus of literature different from the one for which it was meant. It must also be mentioned here that towards the end of his article the author states that the novel may be the only valid artistic form today for in it matter and imagination, knowledge and science combine. Other forms centring on imagination or on other realities are apt to become redundant in an age where

54 Philip P. Hallie in *Horror and the Paradox of Cruelty* (Center for Advanced Studies : Wesleyan University Press, 1969) argues that one's satisfaction in reading horror stories is that at the end there is a *kairos*, 'a significant season', which assures us that there will be no more cruelty.

55 Nathan Drake on the effect of the Gothic on the viewer in *Literary Hours : Or Sketches, Critical, Narrative and Poetic* (London : Longman, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), I, 48.

56 For histories of armies, rebellions and literature see Geoffrey Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770-1870* (London : Fontana, 1982); Jerome J. McGann, 'Romanticism and its Ideologies', *Studies in Romanticism*, 21 (1982).

57 Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*; p. 32, Robert E. Lougy, *Charles Robert Maturin*, (Lewishurg : Bucknell University Press, 1975), pp. 73-74; Varma, *Gothic Flame*, pp. 164-72.

58 See M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism : Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York : W.W. Norton, 1971).

59 For sacred pilgrimages see Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, pp. 207-8; and for unholy magic rites see Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, pp. 46-48. Also see Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1960).

60 For Ruskin and Morris the roughness of Gothic art was a sign of the free play of human imagination in a society with a morally central and humane purpose.

61 Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk* (New York : Grove Press, 1959), p. 52. Hereafter referred to as *Monk*.

62 See André Breton, 'Limits Not Frontiers of Surrealism', *Surrealism*, ed. Harbert Read (New York : Praeger, 1971), pp. 93-116.

63 Louis F. Peck, for instance, says that this scene should 'fill the reader with shame for the author's lack of taste', *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 41. Also see Coleridge's famous attack on *The Monk* reprinted by Garland Grever in *A Wiltshire Parson and His Friends* (New York : Houghton Mifflin, 1926).

64 Lewis's *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor 1815-17*, ed. Mona Wilson (Boston and New York : Houghton Mifflin, 1929) shows his kindly and gentle aspects. Allan Rodway in *The Romantic Conflict* (London : Chatto and Windus, 1963) thinks of Lewis as a humanist.

65 *Ancient Records or the Abbey of Saint Oswythe* (London : Minerva Press, 1801), II, 211. Hereafter referred to as AR.

66 See my article 'The Geometry of Pain : On the Fragmentary Structure of the Gothic Novel', *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, 23 (1985), pp. 87-130.

in the notion of the self and its place in society. There are voices speaking and narrating at a time when both could be censored :

The speeches of Keshabchandra, the plays of Dinabandhu, the novels of Bankimchandra, the *Somprakash* of Sri Vidyabhusan, the homeopathy of Mahendralal Sarkar, all this was bringing in a new concept in the educated group of the time (1860-90).⁷

It is these men who, illustrate a process in the first stage of decolonization which, in the words of Franz Fanon, is the transformation of 'spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with a new language and a new humanity, the 'thing' which had been colonised becomes man....'⁸ Moving on from the historical process into the novelistic we have Kishorimohan Roy writing on Bankimchandra :

He equipped himself with an adequate language and at first drew the attention of all towards his words. Then gradually he used his writings to draw out details in the common households of Bengal. Later he continued to write on the national character, its strength and its sources. With it there were attempts to make people aware of the tastes of independence and bondage. And along with it came the art of living, respect for husband, for parents as well as notions of self-sacrifice and duty.⁹

The quotation is an instance of didacticism associated with novels in its early years in Bengal. Didacticism is in fact an essential component of novels if one looks at its global history. Yet it is difficult to take didacticism always at its face value for very often it is the ostentatious *raison d'être* projected by the self-conscious novelist to his imagined censors, critics or commoners. However, didacticism in the above quotation enters a different category altogether with the mention of states of bondage and freedom. The colonial context brings a new meaning to didacticism and invests it with urges that are powerful and authentic enough to shape a particular literary form. This urge goes beyond making men aware of the two different states of bondage and freedom to that of etching out a national character based on positive values, make it manifest in the everyday lives of men and women and finally make men conscious of a sense of duty and the values of self-sacrifice. Didacticism then, in the case of the Bengali novel, is linked with the first step taken towards a decolonial movement.

Quite often it is difficult to speak of decolonialism in the context of certain novels. *Anandamath*, for instance, because of its concluding section and the advertisement that went with it in the first edition has been a much criticized novel. The novel might be flawed from many directions, not the least being its

unconscious of any heroism in her acceptance of destiny. In fact the author creates situations where all common descriptive notions fail, to a large extent because of the extreme simplicity of Kapalkundala's standpoint and one is left with a grandeur and beauty reminiscent perhaps of another 'kavya', Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*. From its very beginning it seems, the novel is looked upon as an aesthetic form. Here as well the history of the novel differs from that in many other parts of the world where it took several decades to establish itself as a valid aesthetic form. Of course, it should be mentioned here that *Kapalkundala* occasioned another novel *Mrinmoyee*, whose author Damodar Mukhopadhyay had translated a number of popular British novels. He provided a very stereotyped end to the story of Kapalkundala again highlighting the difference in the spirit of conception of the authentic Bengali novel and the popular European form. Damodar Mukhopadhyay's novels are of interest today only to literary historians.

A very common discourse on the novel is the framing of two opposed categories to explain two different kinds of novel — aesthetic and didactic; one based on feelings and the other on events; one abstract and the other concrete. The event-oriented, didactic, concrete form is attributed to English writers, while the feeling-oriented, aesthetic, abstract form to other European writers. Girijaprasanna Roychowdhury writes that in our land of the Aryans, novels based on events are rare, almost non-existent.

If there is a foregrounding of poetic characteristics in the metadiscourse of the novel, an index to its assimilation in the Indian literary system, there is also the imbibing of the genre as a means of revitalizing the same system. The need for revitalization points to changes in the political or social systems which interact with the literary system. A new age, in fact, sets in with the introduction of the world of print. The change is very succinctly stated by Bankimchandra in his essay on "Popular Literature in Bengal" :

And so the Bengali stood, crushed and spiritless, insensible to his own wrongs, till a new light dawned on him, to rouse him, if that were possible, from his state of lethargy. And with this new dawn of life, came into the country one of the mightiest instruments of civilisation, the printing press. Gradually the change set in, and a demand began to be made for a literature of another character than that of the Gitagovind school.⁵

This demand is being made and satisfied by a group, that is the middle class which has no direct say in political, economic or administrative affairs. Their position in the colonial context is fraught with complexities. As Romesh Chunder Dutt puts it, 'the respect for foreign tenets was on the increase, but along with it was strengthened the desire to know of one's land.'⁶ In the context of the larger community they are in a position to articulate, hence direct changes

Turning from these novels to others of a different category, those carrying on traditions of the 'tilasni-eyari' novels, as well as drawing strength from 'Reynoldesque' texts, with generous combinations of sex, lust, suspense, we again come across a framework that is the assertion of a very rigid moral standard. A critical evaluation of *Chitra-o-Gauri* by Haranchandra Rakshit in *Jannabhumi* throws a very clear light on these models. The novel, he says, is about 'the terrifying consequences of sin as a result of falling into bad company, of the modern nineteenth century educated youth Sureschandra; and his wife Chitra, an ideal of a pure woman in reality; risking her life she saves Sureschandra and dies; in reading the characters readers would no doubt receive a great deal of education.'¹¹ These opposites are a part of popular novels or fastsellers anywhere in the world. The difference lies on the note of emphasis- in the nineteenth century the moral is there with an insistence that is jarring, in the twentieth century it is subtle and does not necessarily etch out a definite positive value system that is found in the nineteenth century. The value system is conservative and rigid, but there is an unmistakable historic urge to stand against the tide of degradation, the inevitable consequence of a hundred and fifty years of colonial rule.

The historical novels too present a case of their own. They are symptomatic of the tradition that conceives of the novel as 'kavya'. Distance, an 'otherness', in many cases a mystification gives scope to the poetic imagination. They have often been regarded as romances, but their claim to the novelistic is established in their relationship to the present or the historic moment. It is worth quoting Romesh Chunder Dutt's lines on his aims in writing *Maharashtra- Jeevan Prabhat* :

Reader ! Let us sit together and sing the glory of our nation, remember the valour of modern and ancient times. I take up my pen for this alone. If I succeed in reminding you of those times only then would my efforts be successful, or else throw away my books, the author will not be offended.¹²

The message becomes more important to him than any other novelistic consideration. Thus although we have elements of romance in the historical novel- distanciation, larger than life individuals, heroic codes, elements in the novel loosely dependent on one another, looking through the perspective of the moment of writing which has generated this model, each of the above-mentioned elements gets a double image: distance becomes a mere convention, the individual becomes a model of the general, the private for the public, heroic codes as prescriptions for action in the present, an urgent authentic need repressing formal considerations. Here as well there are texts like Govindachandra Ghose's *Chittabinodini* which looks at the 'Sepoy Mutiny' in an unsympathetic light. However, once more since no genre can be thought of

narrow communal stand, but at the time in which it was written readers, critics and activists took from the text what they wanted. As far as the history of the novel is concerned, *Anandamath* soon becomes a model for a number of later novels. This was so because it gave concrete shape to powerful yet so far undertermined reader expectations and urges. Later, when in the beginning of the twentieth century the nationalist movement received a crystallized form, one of its models, Durgadas Lahiri's *Rani Bhabani* (1909) was sold out within fifteen days of its publication and had to bring out a new edition. *Anandamath* thus became the generator of a model which fulfilled a deeply felt need at a particular time in history. *Anandamath* is a positive instance to support our thesis, but there are a few negative instances too. The negative instances are symptomatic of the dualistic attitude on the part of the English educated privileged middle class to their colonized state.

To go back to the history of the Bengali novel, it starts with a very different kind of didacticism than the one mentioned above. *Phoolmani-o-Karunar Biharan* by H.C. Mullens in 1852, accepted by some critics as a novel and discarded by others as a religious tract, is written from the point of view of the colonizer. Because the author is not insensitive to the social fabric what follows is a heavily disjointed narrative texture, but for the future novelist it shows how excellent a medium the novel is to disseminate ideas to a large reading public. Very similar to the general nature of this novel we have Lal Behari Day's *Chandramukhir Upakhyan* (1851) and Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay's *Sushilar Upakhyan* (1859). The second can be read almost as a social tract prescribing better, more scientific ways of living.

The social novel reinforces the pattern of didacticism with greater stress. The social set-up, the cause and consequences of narration is grasped with greater clarity. In *Alaler Gharer Dulal*, for instance, we have the following introduction: 'The above original novel in Bengali... chiefly treats of the pernicious effects of allowing children to be improperly brought up with remarks on the existing system of education, on self-formation and religious culture.'¹⁰ There is no attempt to camouflage the didacticism. The particular here represents the general. The consequences of bringing up a child improperly actually present a case-study of a prevalent social malaise, the state of a spoilt young 'Babu' in the house of the emerging 'Babus', a parasitic class which is totally the product of colonialism. The reformistic attitude of the author is clear in the premise from which he sets out. Although the novel is permeated with a vivacious, animated spirit, largely the result of its racy, picturesque language and its picaresque, rakish characters - each narrative bifurcation is determined by the reformistic outlook of the author. It is true that the latter results in a certain degree of closure and an artificial suppression of all that contributes to its special piquant flavour. It does give the narration a direction and a plot, lifting it from the level of a sketch to that of a novel.

4. Girijaprasanna Roychowdhury, *Bankimchandra* (Calcutta, A. P. Press, 1886), p. 34.
5. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Popular Literature in Bengal', *Bankim Rachanabali*, III, ed. Jogesh Chandra Bagal (Calcutta : Sahitya Samsad, 1969), p. 97.
6. Romesh Chunder Dutt, 'Bankimchandra o Adhunik Bangiya Sahitya', *Rameshchandra Dutta Prabandha Samkalan*, ed. Nikhil Sen (Calcutta, 1959), p. 6.
7. Sivanath Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkaleen Bangasamj* (Calcutta, 1909), p. 90.
8. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1967), p. 28.
9. Kishorimohan Roy, "Banglar Itihase Bankimchandrer Sthan", *Bharati* (Baisakh 1302 B.S.), p. 8.
10. Pyarichand Mitra, *Alaler Gharer Dulal*, *Satsahitya Granthabali* (Calcutta : Basumati, rpt. from 2nd ed., 1862), p. 182.
11. Haranchandra Rakshit, 'Samalochana Chitra o Gauri', *Jannabhoomi* (Chaitra 1307 B.S.), p. 287.
12. Romesh Chunder Dutt, Quoted in *Bangla Sahitye Atihasik Upanyas*, Bijitkumar Dutta, (Calcutta, 1962), p. 165.
13. Ramgati Nyayratna, *Bangla Bhasha o Sahitya Bisayak Prastab* (Calcutta, 1873), p. 319.

as a constant, negative instances do not disprove our thesis. In the course of a genre's transmission reader expectations may be activated, explored or even challenged and transgressed.

As we enter the domain of the mainstream novel we find both novelists and critics concentrating on the portrayal of character. A reading of *Durgeshnandini* is as follows: 'Birendrasingh is an extremely valorous person. The hero of the text Jagatsingh is young, energetic, religious, valorous and a great lover... One never sees him wavering from Kshatriyalike behaviour...' Characters become projections of national ideals from which readers might draw strength and identity. There is a long critical essay by Debendrabijoy Basu 'Bangla Sahityer Bishesattva' in *Navya bharat*, 1894, where his main thesis is that the European novelist has to bring one event after another in order to show the workings of a character, but the Hindu novelist's objective is to show that external events are powerless to change human beings a great deal, and hence the existence of ideal characters in Bengali literature. The Hindu creates characters, the European analyses them. The Hindu poet in creating characters shows how man fights with adverse circumstances, while the European poet shows changes; growth or degradation in characters through conflicting events. The first is idealistic, the second realistic. And the idealistic creation of characters is undertaken in order to teach men, show them the pathways of duty. The distinction seems rigid at first and one can show negative instances as well. *Krishnakanter Will* might be an example where the individual falls a victim to events. However, if the novel is analysed we see that as the fall of Govindalal begins, the focalization shifts to Bhramar, who remains to the end true to idealistic concepts. The stress then is always on a paradigm of traits or attitudes constituting the ideal, or even sometimes on the most progressive of prevalent discourses on a certain issue. Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Samaj* and *Samsar* are good examples of the latter. All this points once more to the imperative need of the moment to bring about a change, to be conscious of one's own make-up one's identity, a process that may be a first step towards decolonization. Reader expectations based on the process of decolonization on the one hand, and springing from traditional notions of 'kavya' on the other frame the Bengali novel in its early years in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1. R. Jakobson, and J.N. Tynjanov, 'Problems in the Study of Language and Literature', *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 79-80.
2. Debendrabijoy, Basu, 'Noveler Silpa ba Kabita', *Navya Bharat* 1885, pp. 62-75.
3. Purnachandra Basu, 'Saiballini', *Aryadharma* 1870, pp. 21-32.

রাবণ ভক্ত, সর্বোপরি নিষ্ঠুর নিয়তির চক্রে নিষ্পেষিত ও অসহায় মানব সন্তান ।' ৬ সুরেশচন্দ্র মৈত্র এইভাবে রাবণকে বর্ণনা করেন : 'মধুর নায়ক সর্ববিধ সুখভার প্রতীক—সে দক্ষ সেনানী, প্রেমময় স্বামী, মেহকাতর পিতা, জনপ্রিয় শাসক, এবং সুতনু নর ।' ৭ মোবাস্থের আলী, বোধ হয়, মোহিতলালের কথা সবচেয়ে বেশি বাড়িয়ে দেন যেখানে লেখেন : 'যুগগত প্রয়োজনে কবি এ চরিত্রকে সম্পূর্ণ নতুন ভাবে সৃষ্টি করেছেন এবং এ চরিত্রে মানবতাবোধ সুস্পষ্ট হয়ে উঠেছে ।— রাবণ তাঁর কাব্যে রাক্ষস হলেও মহৎ গুণে মণ্ডিত ।— সে কর্তব্যপরায়ণ সম্রাট, প্রজাবৎসল রাজা, সন্তানবৎসল পিতা, মেহবৎসল ভ্রাতা এবং অনুরাগী স্বামী ।' ৮

এই হলো 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য'র প্রধান চরিত্রের বৈশিষ্ট্যের তালিকা । উৎসাহিত পরিবর্তিত চরিত্রের উৎস ও মাইকেলের প্রেরণা বার করতে গেলে সমালোচকেরা সাধারণত পাশ্চাত্য সাহিত্যে খুঁজতে যান । কয়েকজন দক্ষিণভারতেও তাকিয়ে দেখেন, বিশেষত তামিল ভাষায় রচিত কষ্ণ-রামায়ণের প্রভাবের জন্য । ৯ মাইকেলের হাতে কোনো-না কোনো ভাবে এবং কোনো-না-কোনো কারণে রাম-রাবণ চরিত্র রূপান্তরিত হয়েছে, সেই ধারণা খুব ব্যাপকভাবে রটে গেছে । মাইকেলের নিজস্ব ঐতিহ্যের রামায়ণের দিকে সমালোচকেরা তুলনা করার জন্য যে দৃষ্টিক্ষেপ করেন না তা নয় তবে ফতটা করা উচিত হয়তো ততটা করা হয়নি ।

এখানে আমি আমার বক্তব্য বলে রাখি । কৃতিবাসের রাম-রাবণের তুলনায় যে 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য' চরিত্রের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে বিস্তর পরিবর্তন হয়েছে, আমার মতে তা আসলে সঠিক নয় । মূলত রাম-রাবণের যেরকম স্বভাব ও স্বধর্ম রামায়ণে দেখা যায় (বিশেষ করে বাংলাভাষার সব চেয়ে বিখ্যাত কৃতিবাস-প্রণীত রামায়ণে), তা থেকে 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য'র চরিত্র-বিচ্যুতি নেই । পাঠক কৃতিবাসের চরিত্রগণের তুলনায় মাইকেলের রামাদিকে অন্য চোখে দেখেন, তবে সেটা আলাদা একটা ব্যাপার । মূল চরিত্রের রূপ ও রেখা রূপান্তরিত হয়নি ।

চরিত্রগুলি এখন পরীক্ষা করে দেখি । মাইকেলের রাবণ 'কর্তব্যপরায়ণ সম্রাট' আর 'প্রজাবৎসল রাজা' কিনা, সেই বিষয় আমার ছাড়াও চিত্রাঙ্গদা নামে তাঁর একজন খীর এবং তাঁর ইষ্টদেবতা মহাদেব শিবের সংশয় থাকতে পারে, কেননা দ্বিধা না করে এ দুজন সোনার লঙ্কার দুর্দগার জন্য রাবণকে দায়ী মনে করেন । চিত্রাঙ্গদা দুঃখে ও রাগে বলেন : 'হায়, নাথ, নিজ কর্ম-ফলে/মজ্জালে রাক্ষসকূলে মজ্জিলা আপনি' (১:৪০৪-৪০৫) । শিবও মনে করেন : 'পরম ভকত মম নিকমানন্দন ;/কিন্তু নিজ নাম ফলে মজে দুষ্টমতি ।/বিনয়ে হৃদয় মন স্মরিলে সে কথা,/মহেশ্বরি হায়; ! দেবি, দেবি কি মানবে,/কোথা হেন সাধ্য রোধে প্রাজনের গতি ?' (২:৪২৯-৪৩৩) । নিদোষী, আদর্শ রাজেন্দ্র যদি নাই-বা হয়ে থাকেন তো রাক্ষসগণের অধিপতি রাবণ মাইকেলের হাতে 'সন্তানবৎসল পিতা', তাতে কোনো সন্দেহ নেই । প্রথম সর্গে আমরা একজন মেহশীল পিতাকে দেখতে পাই । পুত্র বীরবাহুর মৃত্যুর খবর পেয়ে তাঁর এত দুঃখ লাগে যে তিনি অজ্ঞান হয়ে পড়েন । মাইকেল বলেন :

এ হেন সভায় বসে রক্ষঃকুলপতি

বাক্যহীন পুএশোকে । ঝর ঝর ঝরে

অবিরল অশ্রুধারা তিতিয়া বসনে,

মাইকেলের হাতে রামাদি চরিত্র

ক্রিস্টন বি সীলি

মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্ত ইচ্ছার বন্ধু রাজনারায়ণ বসুকে লেখা চিঠিতে স্পষ্টভাবে লিখলেন, রামকে ভালো চোখে দেখতেন না, বরং রাবণের উপরে তাঁর উৎসাহ ও সম্মান অনেক বেশি : 'People here grumble and say that the heart of the Poet in Meghanad is with the Rakhasas. And that is the real truth. I despise Ram and his rabble, but the idea of Ravan elevates and kindles my imagination : he was a grand fellow.' ^১ এই মনোভাব তাঁর 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য' নানান ভাবে প্রতিফলিত হয় । কাক্যটি পড়লে পাঠকের সহানুভূতি রামের জন্য নয় রাবণের জন্য গড়ে ওঠে । ফলে অনেকে মনে করেন যে সুপরিচিত প্রাচীন রামায়ণের রাম-রাবণের তুলনায় মাইকেলের রাম-রাবণ নিশ্চয় অন্য ধরনের চরিত্র হয়ে গিয়েছে ।

তা সত্ত্বেও অথবা সেই কারণেই হয়তো অধিকাংশ সমালোচক মাইকেলের কৃতির প্রশংসা করেছেন । তিনিই প্রকাশ্যে—নিজের ঢাক বোধহয় একটু বেশি পিড়িয়ে—তা মেনে নিয়ে বললেন : 'The poem is rising into splendid popularity. Some say it is better than Milton—but that is all bosh— nothing can be better than Milton : many say it licks Kalidasa ; I have no objection to that. I don't think it impossible to equal Virgil, Kalidasa and Tasso. Though glorious, still they are mortal poets ; Milton is divine.' ^২ যতই প্রশংসা হোক প্রায় সবাই বলেন, মাইকেলের রাম-রাবণ চরিত্রে মূলগত পরিবর্তন ঘটে গেছে । অবশ্যই এই মতের ব্যতিক্রমে মাইকেলের সমসাময়িক ও ভক্ত কালীপ্রসন্ন সিংহ লিখেছিলেন : 'দত্ত কবির রামচন্দ্রের পবিত্র চরিত্র অবলম্বন করিয়াই মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য লিখিয়াছেন ।' ^৩ তবে বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র চরিত্রের নতুন স্বর উল্লেখ করেছেন : '... Mr. Datta owes a great deal more to Valmiki than the mere story. But, nevertheless, the poem is his own work from beginning to end. The scenes, character, machinery and episodes, are in many respects of Mr. Datta's own creations.' ^৪

রাবণকে নিয়ে মোহিতলাল মজুমদার, খুব সম্ভব বর্তমানের সমালোচকদের মতামতের স্রষ্টা, যখন লিখেছেন : 'মেঘনাদবধে'র রাবণ দুরাচারী দুর্মদ রাক্ষস মাত্র নহে ; কবি তাহার চরিত্রকে সর্ববিধ মর্যাদায় মণ্ডিত করিয়াছেন—রাজা, পিতা, ভাতা, স্বামী, যোদ্ধা ও সরলস্বভাব ভক্ত রূপে তিনি তাহার যে মূর্তি নির্মাণ করিয়াছেন, তাহার কোথাও নীচতা বা কপটতা নাই ।' ^৫

আজকালকার একাধিক সমালোচক মোহিতলালের কথা টেনে নিয়ে রামায়ণের রাবণ ও মাইকেলের রাবণের মধ্যে যে ব্যত্থান, সেটার উপরে জোর দেন । নীলিমা ইব্রাহিম লেখেন : 'রাবণচরিত্র রূপায়ণে যে মধুসূদন পৌরাণিক নীতির পরিবর্তন করেছেন এ সর্জনগ্রাহ্য সত্য, পুরাণের রাবণ রাক্ষস দণ্ডমুখ, কুঁড় হাত । কিন্তু মধুসূদনের রাবণ নামে রাক্ষস, রাবণ রাজা, রাবণ স্বামী, রাবণ পিতা, রাবণ অশুর,

অতিকায় নামে রাবণের আরেকজন পুত্র । কৃতিবাস বলেন

ওবে তখনদূত গিয়া দশানন পাশে ।
 নিবেদন করিতেছে গদগদ ভাষে ॥
 মহারাজ চারিজন তনয় তোমার ।
 রণে গিয়াছিল দুইজন ভ্রাতা আর ॥
 তার মধ্যে পঞ্চ জনে বানরে বধিল ।
 অতিকায় লক্ষ্মণের বাণেতে মরিল ॥
 দূত মুখে এত বাণী করিয়া শ্রবণ ।
 কিছুকাল শুক হয়ে রাহে দশানন ॥
 মুহূর্তেক পরে পুনঃ পাইয়া চেতন ।
 কি করিলে বলিয়া করয়ে জিজ্ঞাসন ॥
 পূর্ববার দূত কৈল সব নিবেদন ।
 তাহা শুনি মূর্ছিত হইল দশানন ॥
 কিছুকাল পরে পুনঃ সংবিৎ পাইয়া ।
 সুদীর্ঘ নিশ্বাস ছাড়ে হুঙ্কার করিয়া ॥
 হইয়াছে অতিশয় শোকোত্তে মগন ।
 না পারয়ে করিবারে ধৈর্য ধারণ ॥
 বিংশতি নয়নে ঘন অশ্রুধারা বয় ।
 মুক্ত কণ্ঠ হয়ে রাজা ক্রন্দন করয় ॥

(পৃ. ৪০২)

শুধু আপন পুত্র নয়, ভ্রাতৃপুত্রকে—যে ভ্রাতাকে রাবণ দেখতে পারেন না, তাঁর পুত্রকে—মায়ামমতা দেখালেন । বিভীষণ ও সরমার সন্তান তরঙ্গীসেন আপন বাপের মাতে মারা যাওয়ার পর বিভীষণ কেঁদে ফেলেছেন, সরমা শোকে ভেঙে গেছেন এবং রাবণ জ্যাঠাও কাঁদেন । কৃতিবাস বলেন :

তখন পাইক কহে গিয়া রাবণ গোচরে ॥
 দূত কহে লঙ্কেশ্বর নিবেদি চরণে ।
 পড়িল তরঙ্গীসেন আজিকার রণে ॥
 তরঙ্গীসেনের মৃত্যু শুনিল লঙ্কেশ্বর ।
 সিংহাসন হৈতে পড়ে ধরঙ্গী উপর ॥
 চৈতন্য পাইয়া রাজা করয়ে ক্রন্দন ।
 রাজারে প্রবোধ দেয় পাত্রমিত্রগণ ॥
 মৃত্যুকাতে বসে ভাবে লঙ্কা অধিকারী ।
 ঘরে ঘরে কান্দে যত সব বীর নারী ॥

(পৃ. ৪০৬)

এই কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণ থেকে নেয়া দৃষ্টান্তে যা পাই, তা পাই মাইকেলের কাব্যে একজন সন্তানবৎসল রাক্ষস পিতা, রাবণ নামে ।

মাইকেলের রাবণ যে ভাইদের সঙ্গে 'স্নেহবৎসল ভ্রাতা' তা আমরা কি করে জানতে পারি ? 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' তাঁর জ্যেষ্ঠ ভ্রাতা কুবেরের উল্লেখ আছে, একটি অলংকারে, তবে রাক্ষসের সঙ্গে সম্পর্কটার বর্ণনা নেই । বিভীষণ আর রাবণের মধ্যে বিরোধ রয়েছে । বিভীষণ তাঁর ভাইয়ের বিপক্ষীয় দলের একজন । সরমা সীতার স্বর

যথা তরু, ভীষ্ম শর সরস শরীরে
বাজিলে, কাঁদে নীরবে । কর ঘোড় করি,
দাঁড়ায় সম্মুখে ভগ্নদূত, ...

(১:৬২-৬৭) আর

এ দূতের মুখে শুনি সুতের নিধন,
হায়, শোকাকুল আজি রাজকুলমণি
নৈকযেয় ! সভাজন দুঃখী রাজ-দুঃখে ।
অধার জগত, মরি, ঘন আবহিলে
দিননাথে ! কত ক্ষণে চেতন পাইয়া,
বিষাদে নিশ্বাস ছাড়ি কহিলা রাবণ;—

(১ : ৭৪-৯)

তার পর শোক-আপসোস মিলে সুন্দর একটা ভাষণ রাবণের মুখ দিয়ে প্রকাশ করার
পরে মাইকেল বলেন

এইরূপে বিলাপিতা আক্ষেপে রাক্ষস—
কুলপতি রাবণ; হায় রে মরি, যথা
হস্তিনায় অশ্ব রাজ, সঞ্জয়ের মুখে
শুনি, ভীমবাহু ভীমসেনের প্রহারে
হত যত প্রিয়পুত্র কুরুক্ষেত্র-রণে ।

(১ : ১১৪-১১৮)

কৃতিবাসের রাবণ পুত্রদের প্রতি কিরকম স্নেহ ও মমতা দেখান, তা নিয়ে মাইকেলের
রাবণের সঙ্গে তুলনা করে দেখা যাক, কত ব্যবধান রয়েছে বা আদৌ ব্যবধান আছে
কিনা । বীরবাহু মারা গেলে কৃতিবাস বলেন :

ভগ্নদূত কহে গিয়া রাবণ গোচর ।
বীরবাহু পড়ে বার্তা শুন লঙ্কেশ্বর ॥
শোকের উপরে শোক হইল তখন
সিংহাসন হৈতে পড়ে রাজা দশানন ॥
চেতন্য পাইয়া রাজা কান্দিল বিস্তর । ১০

কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে বীরবাহুর পরাজয়ের পরে রাবণের শ্রেষ্ঠ ও জ্যেষ্ঠ পুত্র মেঘনাদের
তৃতীয়বার যুদ্ধযাত্রা ও সেইবার তাঁর পরাজয় । তবে বীরবাহুর আগে আরো অনেক
পুত্র মারা গিয়েছিল । তাদেরও মৃত্যুর উপলক্ষে কৃতিবাসের রাবণ রাক্ষস সত্ত্বেও
মনুষ্যের মতো—এমন-কি মাইকেলের রাবণের মতোই—শোক প্রত্যক্ষভাবে প্রকাশ করেন ।

রাক্ষস পুত্রদের মধ্যে মকরাক্ষ নামে একজন, যার মৃত্যুর পরে কৃতিবাস বলেন :

তথ পাইক কহে গিয়া রাবণ গোচর ।
মকরাক্ষ পড়ে রণে শুন লঙ্কেশ্বর ॥
শোকের উপরে শোক হৈল বিপরীত ।
সিংহাসন হতে পড়ে হইয়া মূর্ছিত ॥
পাণ্ডিথি আসিয়া বুঝায় লুপ্তর ।
ধরাসনে পতি রাজা কান্দিল বিস্তর ॥

(পৃ. ৪২৭)

যখন তাঁর জাগ্রত ভাইয়ের ওপরে প্রথমে চোখ পড়ে তখন যারপরনাই খুশি ।

কুন্তকর্ণ গেল তবে ভেটিতে রাবণ ॥

কুন্তকর্ণে দেখিয়া রাবণ কুতূহলী ।

সিংহাসন হৈতে উঠে করে কোলাকুলি ॥

কুন্তকর্ণ রাবণের বন্দিল চরণ ।

বসিতে দিলেন রাজা রত্ন সিংহাসন ॥

(পৃ.৩৮৩)

কুন্তকর্ণ মারা যাবার পর কৃতিবাস বলেন :

কুন্তকর্ণ মৃত্যু কথা করিয়া শ্রবণ ।

ক্রন্দন করয়ে যত লঙ্কাবাসী জন ॥

মুহূর্তেক পরে রাজা চেতন পাইয়া ।

বিলাপ করয়ে শোকে কাতর হইয়া ॥

ভাই নহি আমি যে চণ্ডাল সহোদর ।

কাঁচা ঘুয়ে জাগায়ে পাঠাই যমঘর ॥

(পৃ.৩৯২-৩৯৩)

তার পরে এগারোটি ঐশদী চরণ দিয়ে দীর্ঘ বিলাপ, যেমন

হায় হায় কি হইল

ফুর বিধি কি করিল

প্রাণাধিক ভাই নিল হরি ।

কি করিব কোথা যাব

কোথা গেলে তারে পাব

তা বিনে কিরূপে প্রাণ ধরি ॥

ওরে প্রাণাধিক ভ্রাতা

মোরে ছাড়ি গেলি কোথা

দেখিতে না পাই আর তোরে ।

ধিক্ ধিক্ প্রাণে মোর,

শুনিয়া মরণ ভোর,

এখনো না ছাড়ে এ শরীরে ॥

(পৃ.৩৯৩)

ইত্যাদি । আর শেষে কৃতিবাস বলেন :

এইরূপে ক্রন্দন করয়ে দশানন ।

অশ্রুজলে অভিষিক্ত হইল বদন ॥

(পৃ.৩৯৪)

কৃতিবাসের রাক্ষস রাজা তাঁর একজন ভাইয়ের কাছে একজন রীতিমত 'স্নেহবৎসল ভ্রাতা', নিঃসন্দেহে । মাইকেলের রাবণও ভাই ।

এবার বোন সংক্রান্ত রাবণের ভ্রাতৃ-ভিনি 'স্নেহবৎসল ভ্রাতা' কিন, -পরীক্ষা করা হোক । তাঁর একমাত্র বোনের সঙ্গে খুব ভাব ছিল, যুদ্ধের সময়ও আছে, বোধহয় । তবে সোনার লঙ্কার শোচনীয় পরিস্থিতি অনেকটা ওই ভাবের প্রতিকূলে । বেচারি অপমানিতা শূর্ণগথার আবদারে রাবণ সীতাকে হরণ করতে গিয়েছিলেন । পরে মাইকেলের রাবণ আপন মনে বলেন

...হায়, শূর্ণগথা,

কি কুসঙ্গে দেখেছিলি, তুই রে অভাগী,

কাল পঞ্চবটীবনে কালকূটে ভরা

এ ভুজগে ? কি কুসঙ্গে (তোর দুঃখে দুঃখী)

পাষক শিখা-রূপিনী জানকীরে আমি

আনিবু এ হৈম গেহে ?

(১ : ৯৯-১০৪)

অশোকবনে শোনেন :

‘আছিল সে সভাতলে ধীর ধর্মসম
বীর এক ; কহিল সে, ‘পূজ রঘুবরে,
বৈদেহীয়ে দেহ ফিরি ; নতুবা মরিবে
সবংশে !’ সংসার মদে মত্ত রাখবারি,
পদাঘাত করি তারে কহিল কুবালী ।
অতিমানে গেলা চলি সে নীর-কুঞ্জর
যথা প্রাণনাথ মোর ।’-কহিল সরমা,
‘হে দেবি, তোমার দুঃখে কত যে দুঃখিত
রক্ষোবাজানুজ বলী, কি আর কহিব ?

(৪ : ৫০৩-৫১১)

বিভীষণ ভাইয়ের সঙ্গে খুব একটা স্নেহের সম্পর্ক দেখানো হয় না, ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে’ নয়, কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণেও নয় । তবে মাইকেলের খণ্ড-কাহিনীর শুরুর আগে রাবণের আরেক ভাইয়ের যুদ্ধে পতন ঘটেছিল । মাঝে মাঝে রাবণ তাঁর মৃত ভাইয়ের কথা স্মরণ করেন ।

কহিলা রাক্ষসপতি,--‘কুন্তকর্ণ বলী
ভাই মম,--তায় আমি জাগানু অকালে
ভয়ে ; হায়, দেহ তার, দেহ, সিদ্ধু-তীরে
ভূপতিত, গিরিশৃঙ্গ কিম্বা তরু যথা
বক্ষাঘাতে !’

(১ : ৭৫১-৭৫৫)

অথবা

... মরিল সংগ্রামে
শূলীশভুসম ভাই-কুন্তকর্ণ মম,
কুমার বাসবজয়ী, দ্বিতীয় জগতে
শক্তিধর ! প্রাণ আমি ধরি কোন্ সাথে ?
আর কি দৌঁহে ফিরি পাব ভবতলে ?-

(৯ : ৩৭-৪১)

এমন ইঙ্গিত থেকে আমরা ধরে নিতে পারি যে কুবের আর বিভীষণের সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক ভালো না থাকলেও রাবণ কুন্তকর্ণের সঙ্গে সত্যিকারের ‘স্নেহবৎসল ভ্রাতা’র মতো ব্যবহার করতেন ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে’ । তবে স্নেহটা কত গভীর ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে’ নয়, কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণ থেকেই জ্ঞাপন করা যায় ।

কুন্তকর্ণের পুরো ছয় মাস ঘুমনো উচিত ছিল । কিন্তু ভালো যোদ্ধা প্রয়োজন বলে অত সময় ঘুমোতে নেয়া যায়নি । বাধ্য হয়ে কৃত্তিবাসের রাবণ তাঁর ভাইকে যত্ন করে জাগাতে আশ্রা দেন ।

পাঁচ মাস গত নিদ্রা একমাস আছে ।
আজি লক্ষা মজিলে সে কি করিবে পাছে ॥
কুন্তকর্ণে জাগাইতে করহ যতন ।
প্রাণসত্ত্বে মোর যেন হয় সচেতন ॥

(৭. ৩৮০)

সব উক্তি থেকে কি বলা যায়, রাবণ 'অনুরাগী স্খামী'? চিত্রাঙ্গদা অশ্রুত রাবণের কথায় সাপ্তনা পান না ।

'কে, কই, এ কাল অগ্নি জ্বালিয়াছে আজি
লঙ্কাপুরে ? হায়, নাথ, নিজ কর্ম ফলে,
মজ্জালে রাক্ষসকূলে, মজ্জিলা আপনি !'
এতেক কহিয়া বীরবাহুর জননী,
চিত্রাঙ্গদা, কাঁদি সঙ্গে সঙ্গীদলে লয়ে,
প্রবেশিলা অশ্রুঃপুরে ।

(১ : ৪০৩-৪০৮)

তবে পাটরানী মন্দোদরীর সঙ্গে রাবণ সত্যি সত্যি অনুরাগ ও বিয়গ্নতা মেথানো একটা ভাব প্রকাশ করেন । মেথনাদের মৃত্যুর পরে রাবণ যুদ্ধ করার জন্য প্রস্তুত হন । এমন সময় মন্দোদরী ছুটে এসে তাঁর স্বামীর পায়ে পড়েন । তখন রাবণ :

যতনে সতীরে তুলি, কহিলা বিধাদে
রক্ষোবাজ, 'বাম'এবে, রক্ষঃ-কুলভ্রাগি,
আমা দৌহা প্রতি বিধি ! তবে যে বাঁচিছি
এখনও, সে কেবল প্রতিবিধিৎসিতে
মৃত্যু তার ! যাও ফিরি শূন্য ঘরে তুমি ; -
রণক্ষেত্রযাত্রী আমি, কেন রোধ মোরে ?
বিলাপের কাল, দেবি, চিরকাল পাব !
বৃথা রাজ্যসুখে, সতি, জলাঞ্জলি দিয়া,
বিরলে বসিয়া দৌহে স্মরিব তাহারে
অহরহ । যাও ফিরি ; কেন নিবাইবে
এ রোযাগি অশ্রুনীরে, রাগি মন্দোদরি ?

(৭ : ৩৩৮-৩৪৮)

যদিও এখানেও স্ত্রীর চাইতে পুত্রের জন্য রাবণের আবেগ অনেক বেশি প্রবল-তা নাহলে তিনি কি বলতেন যে শুধু পুত্রের মৃত্যুর প্রতিবিধিৎসার জন্যই বেঁচে আছেন-
তবুও মন্দোদরীর প্রতি সত্যি একটা অনুরাগের অভিব্যক্তি অস্বীকার করা যায় না ।

কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে রাবণ ও চিত্রাঙ্গদার মধ্যে সম্পর্ক তেমন ঘনিষ্ঠ নয় এবং বীরবাহুর মৃত্যুর পরে শুধু তাঁর পিতা রাবণ বিলাপ করেন । মাতা সেখানে অনুপস্থিত । মেথনাদের হত্যার পর পিতা আর মাতা একসঙ্গে শোক প্রদর্শন করেন । যেখানে 'মেথনাদবধ কাব্যে' স্ত্রীর প্রতি করুণাময় রাবণ আন্তরিক হৃদয়তা দেখান, কৃতিবাসে সেই দৃশ্য নেই । তবে কৃতিবাসে রাবণ ও মন্দোদরী উভয়ে উপস্থিত এবং আক্ষেপ করেন । উপরন্তু রাবণের শোকের সঙ্গে রাগ এবং নিজে যুদ্ধে যাওয়ার উদ্যোগ মনস্থির করাটা আমরা দেখতে পাই কৃতিবাসে, যেমন আমরা পেয়েছি 'মেথনাদবধ কাব্যে' । কৃতিবাস বলেন :

কিছুদিন ছিল সুখ

এখন ঘটিল দুখ

হেন পুত্র পড়ে রণস্থলে ॥

যদিও বোনকে দোষ দিচ্ছেন তবুও স্বীকার করতে হবে যে তিনি কোমল, সহিষ্ণু, স্নেহবৎসল ভাবে 'রক্ষা' করেন ।

কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে এত প্রকট ভাবাবেগ নেই বটে, তবে বোনের অনুরোধে তিনি সীতাকে হরণ করতে গিয়েছিলেন । বোনকে কি সম্বোধন করার জন্যে, না নিজের লোভ মেটাবার জন্যে করেছেন, তা ঠিক জানা যায় না । মরে যাবার সময়ে, কৃতিবাসের রাবণ, রামকে কেবল বলেন :

আছয়ে অনেক কথা আমার মনেতে ।
কত কব রঘুনাথ তোমার সাক্ষাতে ॥
এক কথা কহি রাম, দেখ বিদ্যমান ।
লক্ষণ কাটিল শূর্ণগথা নাক কাণ ॥
সেই এসে উপদেশ কহিল আমারে ।
তাহার বুদ্ধিতে আমি সীতা আনি 'হ'রে ॥
শূর্ণগথা কান্দিলেক চরণেতে ধরে ।
মন হৈল সীতারে হরিয়া আনিবারে ॥

(পৃ.৫২৮)

মাইকেলের রচনায় রাবণের বোনের দুঃখের দরুন রাবণ দুঃখী এবং ওই দুঃখে সোনার লঙ্কায় সীতাকে আনেন । কৃতিবাস এক পয়ার দ্বিপদীতে বলেন যে শূর্ণগথা কান্নাকাটি করেন আর সঙ্গে-সঙ্গে রাবণ সীতাকে হরণ করা স্থির করে ফেলেন । 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' যে পরিস্ফুট ভ্রাতৃস্নেহের পুঞ্জ আমরা দেখতে পাই, সেটার বীজ কৃতিবাসের কাব্যে রয়েছে ।

মাইকেলের রাবণ দোষী বা নির্দোষী হন-না কেন, তিনি কী অর্থে অনুরাগী স্বামী, সে-সম্বন্ধে একটু ভেবে নিতে হবে । প্রথম সর্গে তাঁকে তাঁর একজন স্ত্রীর সঙ্গে কথা বলতে আমরা দেখি । সেই 'দৃশ্যতে মহিষী চিত্রাঙ্গদা তাঁর স্বামীর সমুখে এসে মৃদু স্বরে কেঁদে-কেঁদে প্রশ্ন করে নালিশ জানান ।

'একটী রতন মোরে দিয়াছিল বিধি
কৃপাময় ; দীন আমি থুয়েছি ত্বারে
রক্ষাহেতু তব কাছে, রক্ষঃকুল-মণি,
তরুর কোটরে রাখে শাবকে যেমতি
পাখী । কহ, কোথা তুমি রেখেছ তাহারে,
লঙ্কানাথ ? কোথা মম অমূল্য রতন ?'

(১ : ৩৪৭-৩৫২)

তদুত্তরে রাবণ বলেন :

'এ বৃথা গল্পনা, প্রিয়ে, কেন দেহ মোরে !
গ্রহদোষে দোষী জনে কে নিষেদ, সুন্দরি ?'

(১ : ৩৫৭-৩৫৮)

এবং

'এক পুত্রশোকে তুমি আকুলা, ললনে,
স্ত পুত্রশোকে বুক আমার ফাটিছে
দিবা নিশি !'

(১ : ৩৬৭-৩৬৯)

তিনি এ স্ত্রীকে বলেন যে শোকাত্ত রক্তাক্ত বদলে তাঁর পদ বোঁদ করা উচিত । এটি

মৃত্যুর পর সেই স্ত্রী সতী হন, খুব সম্ভব 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' সেই দুটি উপাদান 'রামলীলা' থেকে আসে। অন্তত সেইক্ষেত্রে হিন্দী-ভাষী রামলীলার সঙ্গে মিল দেখা যায়।

যেই সময় বাংলাদেশে শারদীয়া দুর্গাপূজা হয়, সেই সময় অন্যত্র একাধিক দিন-ব্যাপী বাৎসরিক রামলীলা আশ্বিনমাসের শুক্লা দশমী অবধি অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। নিজস্ব দশমীতে রাবণবধ ঘটে তবে তার আগে মেঘনাদকে হনন করা হয়। রামলীলায় মেঘনাদের শব্দ-সংকার এবং তাঁর স্ত্রীকে-প্রমীলা নয়, সুলাচনা নামে- চিতায় সতী হতে দেখানো হয়। মাইকেল কখনো রামলীলা দেখেছিলেন কিনা সঠিক বলা যায় না। গৌরদাস বসাক তাঁর একটা স্মৃতিকথার পাদটীকায় রামলীলার উল্লেখ করেন :

'The Hindustani Ram Jatra and Ram Lila are performed with great eclat mostly by professional people'.^{১৩} গৌরদাস যখন রামলীলা সম্বন্ধে জানতেন, তখন মাইকেলের জানবার কথা। যাই হোক, প্রমীলার সতীদাহ হয় রামলীলার প্রভাবে এসেছে নাইয় কবি স্বতন্ত্রভাবে বানিয়েছিলেন। কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণে সে-দৃশ্য দেখানো হয় না।

অন্য ভারতীয় ঐতিহ্য থেকে হোক বা পাশ্চাত্য সাহিত্য থেকে হোক, যতই অভিনব উপাদান থাকুক না কেন এবং সাহিত্য-সমালোচক 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' রাবণের 'সম্পূর্ণ নতুন' চরিত্র সম্বন্ধে যাই বলুন, সেই রাক্ষসরাজা সীতাকে হরণ করেছেন, যেভাবে তিনি করেছিলেন কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণে। কৃত্তিবাসের কাব্যে দুটো জায়গায় সীতার সঙ্গে রাবণের দেখা-সাক্ষাৎ হয়, প্রথমে পঞ্চবটী বনে যখন আসল হরণ পর্বটি ঘটে এবং দ্বিতীয়টি হচ্ছে লঙ্কার অশোকবনে যখন সীতা বন্দী। 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' আমরা মাত্র প্রথম পরিস্থিতিতে সীতার সঙ্গে রাবণের ব্যবহার দেখার সুযোগ পাই। অন্যটি মাইকেল তাঁর কাব্যে বর্ণনা করেন না। সেখানে, মানে অশোকবনে, রাবণ কিভাবে ব্যবহার করতেন, তা বলা যায় না। তবে হরণ করার সময় রাবণের যে চরিত্র কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণে পাওয়া যায়, 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' তা থেকে বেশমাত্র পার্থক্য নেই। মাইকেলের কাব্যে সীতা সরমার সঙ্গে কথা বলার সময় ওই আগের ঘটনার বিবরণ জানা যায়। সরমা জিজ্ঞেস করেন :

...নিষ্ঠুর, হায়, দুষ্ট লঙ্কাপতি !

কে ছেঁড়ে পশ্মের পর্ণ ? কেমন হরিল

ও বরাক্স-অলঙ্কার, বুঝিতে না পারি ?

(৪ : ৮০-৮২)

কৈফিয়তে সীতা বলেন :

'বৃথা গজ দশাননে তুমি, বিধুমুখি !

আপনি খুলিয়া আমি ফেলাইনু দূরে

আভরণ, যবে পাপী আমারে ধরিল

বনাশ্রমে। ছড়ায়নু গথে সে সকলে,

চিহ্ন-সেতু। সেই সেতু আনিয়াছে হেথা—

এ কনক-লঙ্কাপুরে—ধীর রঘুনাথে !'

(৪ : ৯৩-৯৮)

কৃত্তিবাসও একই কৈফিয়ৎ দেন :

রামে জানাইতে সীতা ফেলেন ভ্রূষণ।

সীতার ভ্রূষণ পুন্নে ছাইল গগন ॥

আভরণ গলার ফেলেন সীতাদেবী।

পুত্রশোক মন্দোদরী করিছে রোদন ।
মন্দোদরী ক্রন্দনেতে বুঝিল রাবণ ॥

শোকের উপরে শোক পাইল রাবণ ।
বসিলে সোয়াস্তি নাই করয়ে শয়ন ॥
ইহুজিৎ শোক তবু নহে পাসরণ ।
আপনি সাজিল রাজা করিবারে রণ ॥
শ্রীলোকের ক্রন্দন শুনিয়া ঘরে-ঘর ।
অভিমানে পরিপূর্ণ রাজা লঙ্কেশ্বর ॥

.....

ধনুর্বাণ ল'য়ে রাবণ যায় মহাক্রোধে ।
রাণী মন্দোদরী আসি পশ্চাতে বিরোধে ॥
আপনার দোষে রাজা কৈলে বংশনাশ ।
রামের সীতা ভারে দেহ থাক গৃহবাস ॥
মন্দোদরী পানে রাজা ফিরিয়া না চায় ।
মৃত্যুকালে রোগী যেন ঔষধ না খায় ॥

(পৃ. ৪৬৪-৪৬৬)

মাইকেল কৃত্তিবাসের এই মন্দোদরীর বিলাপের বর্ণনা ভাগ করে 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যের' চিত্রাঙ্গদার এবং মন্দোদরীর শোকের দৃশ্য দুটি সৃষ্টি করেন । দুজন স্ত্রী আকুল হয়ে কাছে ছুটে আসেন আর অবশেষে সখীদের সঙ্গে অস্তঃপুরে ফিরে যান । মাইকেল রাবণের উপরে ভৎসনা মন্দোদরীকে দিয়ে না করিয়ে চিত্রাঙ্গদাকে দিয়ে করান । এখানে মাইকেল মন্দোদরীকে কিছু বলতে দেন না । তবে উভয় কাব্যে মন্দোদরী অস্তঃপুরে প্রস্থান করার পর, রাবণ ক্রোধে অভিমানে রাম-লক্ষ্মণের সঙ্গে যুদ্ধ করতে যান । অনুরাগী স্বামী কি এমনভাবে অক্ষিত হয় ?

সুরেশচন্দ্র মৈত্র 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' রাক্ষসদের সুস্থতা ও সদব্যবহার দেখিয়ে মন্তব্য করেন, খুব সম্ভব সেই বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলি কবীর দ্রাবিড়ী রামায়ণ থেকে নেয়া । তদুপরি তা যদি হয়, 'মধুসূদন বৃহত্তর ভারতের শিল্পসাহিত্যের সঙ্গে বাংলা সাহিত্যিকে মিলিয়ে তার প্রাদেশিক মূঢ়তা ভেঙ্গে দিয়েছেন । অবসান ঘটালেন বাঙ্গালী-কৃত্তিবাসের দৃষ্টি-সঙ্কীর্ণতার ।' ^{১১} যদিও মাইকেলের আর কৃত্তিবাসের রাবণ প্রায় একই চরিত্র, তবুও দ্রাবিড়ী প্রভাব তাঁর মনোভাব ও দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিতে থাকতেও পারে । 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যের' মধ্য দিয়ে মাইকেল অন্য ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর প্রাদেশিক সীমান্ত পাড়ি দিয়েছেন । কিন্তু দ্রাবিড় দেশে যাত্রা না করে উত্তর ও পশ্চিম ভারতের দিকে গেলেন, যেখানে দুর্গাপূজার বদলে রামলীলা অনুষ্ঠিত হয় ।

কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণে মেঘনাদের ন'হাজার স্ত্রী থাকলেও কোনো স্ত্রীর নাম পাওয়া যায় না । প্রমীলা নামটি বলাবাহুল্য কাশীদাসী মহাতারত থেকে তোলা । প্রমীলার গুণচয়ের নানান উৎস হতে পারে-ভার্জিলের ক্যামিল, টাসোর ক্রিও ওথবা স্বয়ং কাশীদাসের প্রমীলা^{১২} বা যে কোনো বাঙালি স্ত্রী এবং মাইকেলের আপন কল্পনা শক্তি সব মিলিয়ে । তবে যে মেঘনাদের একজন প্রধান স্ত্রী নামসূচক আছেন, এবং স্বামীর

ঠেই লো এ পোড়া দেহে নাহি, রক্ষোবধু,

আভরণ । বৃথা তুমি গঞ্জ দশাননে ।'

(৪ : ৩৬৭-৩৮৩)

কুন্তিবাসী রামায়ণে ঘটনা প্রায় একইভাবে ঘটেছে । কুন্তিবাস বলেন :

এত ক্ষণে রাবণের সিদ্ধ অভিলাষ ।

তপস্বীর বেশ ধরি যায় সীতা পাশ ॥

ভিক্ষা খুলি করি কান্ধে করে ধরে ছাতি ।

সকল বসন রাজা ধরে নানা গতি ॥

রাবণ আমার নাম জানে মুনি গণে ।

বড় প্রীতি পাইলাম তোমা দরশনে ॥

...

ভিক্ষা দিলে যাই চলে নিজ নিকেতন ॥

...

জানকী বলেন দ্বিজ এক কথা কহি ।

আজ্ঞা বিনে প্রভুর ঘরের বাহির নহি ॥

রাবণ বলিল ভিক্ষা আনহ সম্বর ।

নতুবা উত্তর দেহ যাই নিজ ঘর ॥

জানকী বলেন ব্যর্থ অতিথি যাইবে ।

ধর্ম কর্ম নষ্ট হবে প্রভু কি বলিবে ॥

...

ফল হাতে বাহির হইলেন জানকী ।

লইছত আইল দুষ্ট রাবণ পাতকী ॥

ধরিয়া সীতার হাত লইল স্বরিত ।

জানকী বলেন হায় একি বিপরীত ॥

দুরাচার দূর হ রে পাপিষ্ঠ দুর্জন ।

আমা লাগি হবে তোর সবংশে মরণ ॥

রাবণ বলিল সীতা শুনহ বচন ।

আম্ম পরিচয় কহি আমি দশানন ॥

রাক্ষসের রাজা আমি লক্ষা নিকেতন ।

কুড়ি হাত কুড়ি চক্ষু দশটি বদন ॥

তপস্বীর বেশ ধরি আমি তপোবন ।

অনুগ্রহ কর মোরে আমি দাস জন ॥

(পৃ. ১৮৩-১৮৪)

তার পর সীতার তর্কসনায়, রাবণ ক্রুদ্ধ হন । কুন্তিবাস বলেন :

করে দুষ্ট কুড়িপাটি দন্ত কড়মড়ি ।

জানকী কাঁপেন যেন কলার বাগুড়ি ॥

প্রকাশে রাক্ষস মূর্তি অতি ভয়ঙ্কর ।

অধিক তর্জন করে রাজা লঙ্কেশ্বর ॥

সীতারে ধরিয়া রাখে তুলিল রাবণ ।

(পৃ. ১৮৫)

সে ভূষণে সুশোভিতা হইল পৃথিবী ॥

ছিড়িয়া ফেলেন মণি মুকুতার ঝারা ।

হিমালয় গৈলে যেন বহে গঙ্গাধারা ॥

শ্রীরাম বলিয়া সীতা করেন ক্রন্দন ।

অশ্রুধীরে হাহাকার করে দেবগণ ॥

(পৃ. ১৮৭)

মাইকেলের হাতে যে সরমার অভিযোগে রাবণ ক্ষমা পেয়েছেন তা নয় । এই অপরাধের জন্য সীতার আভরণ ছিনিয়ে নেওয়া—তিনি কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে দোষী ছিলেনই না ।

‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে’ হরণ করাটার বর্ণনা করতে গিয়ে সীতা সরমার কাছে রাবণের কথা বলছেন :

‘সুধার্ত অতিথি আমি, কহিনু তোমারে ।

দেহ ভিক্ষা ; নহে কহ, যাই অন্য স্থলে ।

অতিথি-সেবায় তুমি বিরত কি আজি,

জানকি ? রঘুর বংশে চাহ কি ঢালিতে

এ কলঙ্ক-কালি, তুমি রঘু-বধু ? কহ,

কি গোরবে অবহেলা কর ব্রহ্ম-শাপে ?

দেহ ভিক্ষা ; শাপ দিয়া নহে যাই চলি ।

দুঃশু রাক্ষস এবে সীতাকাণ্ড-অরি—

মোর শাপে ।’—লজ্জা ভাজি, হায় লো স্বজনি,

ভিক্ষা-দ্রব্য লয়ে আমি বাহিরিনু ভয়ে,—

না বুঝে পা দিনু ফাঁদে ; অমনি ধরিল

হাসিয়া ভাসুর তব আমায় তখনি;

(৪ : ৩৩৭-৩৪৮)

...

‘দূরে গেল জটাজুট ; কমন্ডনু দূরে !

রাজরথী-বেশে মূঢ় আমায় তুলিল

স্বর্ণ-রথে । কহিল যে কত দুষ্টমতি,

কভু রোয়ে গর্জি, কভু সুমধুর স্বরে,

স্মরিলে, শরমে ইচ্ছি মরিতে, সরমা !

‘চালাইল রথ রথী । কাল-সর্প-মুখে

কাঁদে যথা ভেকী, আমি কাঁদিবু, সুভগে,

বৃথা ! স্বর্ণ-রথ-চক্র ঘর্ঘরি নির্ঘোষে,

পূরিল কানন-রাজী, হায়, ডুবাইয়া

অভাগীর আর্তনাদ, প্রভঞ্জন-বলে

ব্রহ্ম তরুকুল যবে নড়ে মড়মড়ে,

কে পায় শূনিতে যদি কুহরে কপোতী ?

ফাঁফর হইয়া, সখি, খুলিনু সধরে

কঙ্কণ, বলয়, হার, সিঁধি, কণ্ঠমালা,

পুণ্ডল, নুপুর, কাঁকী, ছড়াইবু পথে ।

আর :

শ্রীরাম বলেন শুন মিত্র বিভীষণ ।
কেমনে সঙ্কটে আমি পাঠাব লক্ষণ ॥
একে ইন্দ্রজিৎ সেই দুষ্ট নিশাচর ।
তাহাতে সঙ্কট পুরী লঙ্কার ভিতর ॥
বালক লক্ষণ হয় সহজে কাতর ।
মনোদুঃখে ফলাহারে শীর্ণ কলেবর ॥
কষ্ট পেয়ে বলহীন ভাবি তাই মনে ।
কিভাবে করিবে যুদ্ধ ইন্দ্রজিৎ সনে ॥
বিভীষণ বলে গৌসাই ভাব কি কারণ ।
শত ইন্দ্রজিৎ বল ধরেন লক্ষণ ॥

(পৃ. ৪৫৭)

বেশ কিছু বলাবলির পরে রাম অনুমতি দেন । কৃষ্ণিবাস বলেন :

গড় মধ্যে পাঠাইতে শঙ্কা হয় মনে ।
বিভীষণ হাতে সমর্পিলেন লক্ষণে ॥

(পৃ. ৪৫৭)

কৃষ্ণিবাসের রাম যে সব সময় ভয়হীন, তা মোটেই নয় ।

আরেক আবেগপূর্ণ দৃশ্যও সফলভাবে তুলনা করা যাবে । যখন লক্ষণ শক্তিশূন্যে আহত হয়ে মড়ার মতো শুয়ে আছেন তখন রাম শোকে ভেঙে পড়েন, ‘রমণীর ন্যায়’ বলতে পারা যায় । মাইকেল এই নাটকীয় মুহূর্তে রামের মুখে দিলাপ ভাষণ বসিয়ে দেন, দীর্ঘ আটাল্লিটি পয়ার চরণ দিয়ে । তা থেকে উদ্ধৃত করি :

‘রাজ্য ত্যজি, বনবাসে নিবাসিনু যবে,
লক্ষণ, কুটীরদ্বারে, আইলে যামিনী,
ধনুঃ করে হে সুধব্রি, জাগিতে সত্তত,
রক্ষিতে আমায় তুমি ; আজি রক্ষঃপুরে—
আজি এই রক্ষঃপুরে অরি মাঝে আমি,
বিপদ-সলিলে মগ্ন ; তবুও তুলিয়া
আমায়, হে মহাবাহু, নতিছ তুলে
বিরাম ? রাখিবে আজি কে, কহ, আমারে ?
উঠ, বলি ! কবে তুমি বিরত পালিতে
ব্রাতৃ-আজ্ঞা ? তবে যদি মম ভাগ্যদোষে—
চিরভাগ্যহীন আমি—ত্যজিলা আমারে,
প্রাণাধিক, কহ, শুনি কোন্ অপরাধে
অপরাধী তব কাছে অত্যাগী জানকী ?
দেবর লক্ষণে স্মরি রক্ষঃকারাগারে,
কাঁদিছে সে দিবানিশি ! কেমনে তুলিলে—
হে ভাই, কেমনে তুমি তুলিলে হে আজি
মাতৃসম নিত্য যারে সেবিতে আদরে !
হে রাজবংশধর, তব কুলবধু,
রাখে বাঁধি পোলেধেয় ? না রাখি সম্মানে

কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে রাবণ যতই সীতার উপরে অত্যাচার করেন, তার চেয়ে তিনি কম করেন না 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে'।

রাম (লক্ষণ) সম্বন্ধে কেউ না কেউ মনে করেন যে মাইকেল ওই (দুটি) চরিত্র ছোটো করে বানিয়েছেন। কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণের সঙ্গে আবার তুলনা করলে তা প্রমাণ করা দুষ্কর। বাণ্মীকির মহাকাব্যে রাম-রাবণের চরিত্র যেমন ছিল, মোটামুটি তেমনি করে চিত্রিত হয় 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে'। অবশ্যই মাইকেলের রাক্ষসরা অপমান করে 'ভিত্তিরী' বলে রামকে ডাকেন। তাঁর রামও নিরাশায় দুঃখ প্রকাশ করে নিজেকে 'ভিত্তিরী' বলে অভিহিত করে ডাকেন। তবে শুধু বললে তো হয় না। স্বীকার করতে হবে কৃতিবাস মধ্যযুগীয় ভক্তিবশত যেমন মানবোচিত রাজকুমার রামকে একেবারে বিফুর অবতার হিসেবে গ্রহণে, মাইকেল সেইরকম করেননি। 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' রাম মূলত বাণ্মীকির আদি রামের মত শুধু মানুষ, দেবতা নন।

মানুষ তো বটেই তবে বীরপুরুষ মহৎ মানুষ কিনা অনেকে সন্দেহ করেন। প্রমথনাথ বিশী মনুভাবে ব্যাখ্যা বিশ্লেষণ করে বোঝালেন : 'রাবণকে তিনি এত প্রকাণ্ড করিয়া গড়িয়াছিলেন যে তার চেয়ে বড়ো করা সম্ভব ছিল না—তাই তুলনায় রাম ও লক্ষণ ছোটো হইয়া গেল।' ২৪ মোবাস্থের আলী সোজাসুজি লেখেন : 'রামের তীরুতা ও কাপুরুষতা সর্বজনস্বীকৃত।' ২৫

রামের কাপুরুষতা বাণ্মীকির ও কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে প্রতীয়মান। যেভাবে তিনি লুকিয়ে সুগ্রীবের ভাই বালিকে মেরেছেন, সেটাকে কাপুরুষতা বলে মেনে নিতে বাধ্য। 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে'র অষ্টম সর্গে যখন রাম প্রতদেণের সস্ত্রীবনীপুত্রী ভ্রমণ করছেন তখন মাইকেল সেই ঘটনা বালিকে উল্লেখ করে বলতে দেন। তবে মাইকেলের রচনায় সঙ্গে সঙ্গে রামকে ক্ষমা করা হয়। বালি বলেন :

... 'কি হেতু হেথা সশরীরে আজি,
রঘুকুলচূড়ামণি ? অন্যায় সমরে
সংহারিলে মোরে তুমি ভূষিতে সুগ্রীবে ;
কিন্তু দূর কর ভয়, এ কৃতান্তপুরে
নাহি জানি ফোথ মোরা, জিতেপ্রিয় হবে।' (৮ : ৬১২-৬১৬)

অন্যত্র লক্ষণের মেঘনাদ-হত্যায় যাবার প্রাক্কালের দৃশ্যর দিকে আমাদের দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করে মোবাস্থের আলি লেখেন : 'লক্ষণ মেঘনাদবধের জন্য প্রস্তুত হয়ে রামের নিকট অনুমতিলাভের জন্য এসেছে। তখন সে তীব্র রমণীর ন্যায় শঙ্কিত হয়ে পড়েছে। লক্ষণ ও দ্বিতীয় যতই তাকে দৈবীশক্তির আশ্বাস দিক-না কেন, কিছুতেই তার ভয় ঘুচে না। প্রাণাধিক প্রিয় ভাই লক্ষণকে এই সপ্নবিরে পাঠাতে কিছুতেই তার মন চায় না।' ২৬ মাইকেল সত্যি এইভাবে বলেছেন, যেমন :

'কেমনে পাঠাই তোরে সে সপ্নবিরে,
প্রাণাধিক ? নাহি' কাজ সীদায় উদ্ধারি।' (৬ : ৫১-৫২)

কৃতিবাসের রাম তো কম সংকোচ বোধ করেননি। কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে দ্বিতীয় অনুগ্রহ করে বলেন :

সুধানিধি তুমি, দেব সুধাংশু ; বিতরু

জীবনদায়িনী সুধা, বাঁচাও লক্ষণে--

বাঁচাও, কবুগাময়, ভিখারী রাখবে ।'

(৮ : ১৯-৭৭)

এখানে যদি রাম একটু বেশি ভাব-আক্রান্ত হন, তবে মাইকেল পুরোপুরি দায়ী বলে সিদ্ধান্ত করা চলে না । এত সুন্দরভাবে রচিত না হলেও একই দৃশ্য প্রায় একই রকমে কৃতিদাসী রামায়ণে বিদ্যমান । কৃতিদাস বলেন :

রণ জিনি রঘুনাথ পেয়ে অবসর ।

লক্ষণেরে কোলে করি কাম্বেদন বিস্তর ॥

কি কুঞ্জে ছাড়িলাম অযোধ্যা নগরী ।

মৈল পিতা দশরথ রাজ্য অধিকারী ॥

জনক নন্দিনী সীতা প্রাণের সুন্দরী ।

দিনে দুই প্রহরে রাবণ কৈল চুরি ॥

হান্ধলাম প্রাণাধিক অনুজ লক্ষণ ।

কি করিবে রাজ্য ভোগে পুনঃ যাই বন ॥

লক্ষণ সুমিত্রা মাতার প্রাণের নন্দন ।

কি বলিয়া নিবারিব তাঁহার ক্রন্দন ॥

এনেছি সুমিত্রা মাতার অকলের নিধি ।

আসিয়া সাগর পারে কাল হৈল বিধি ॥

মোর দুঃখে লক্ষণ যে দুঃখী নিরন্তর ।

কেন হে নিষ্ঠুর হ'লে না দেহ উত্তর ॥

সবাই সুধাবে বার্তা আমি গেলে দেশে ।

কহিব তোমার মৃত্যু কেমন সাহসে ॥

আমার লাগিয়া তাই কর প্রাণ রক্ষা ।

তোমা বিনা বিদেশে মাগিয়া খাব ভিক্ষা ॥

রাজ্যধনে কার্য নাই নাহি চাই সীতে ।

সাগরে ত্যজিব প্রাণ তোমার শোকেতে ॥

উদয়াস্ত যত দূর পৃথিবী সন্টার ।

তোমার মরণে খ্যাতি রহিল আমার ॥

উঠ রে লক্ষণ তাই রঞ্জে ডুবে পাশ ।

কেন বা আমার সঙ্গে এলে বনবাস ॥

সীতার লাগিয়া তুমি হারাইলে প্রাণ ।

তুমি যে লক্ষণ মম প্রাণের সমান ॥

সুবর্ণের বাগিজ্যে মাগিকো দিনু ডালি ।

তোমা বধে' রঘুকূলে রাখিলাম কালি ॥

কেন বা রাবণ সঙ্গে করিলাম রণ ।

আমার প্রাণের নিধি নিল কোন জন ॥

কার্ত্তবীৰ্য্যার্জুন রাজ্য সহস্র বাহুধর ।

তা'হা হৈতে লক্ষণ যে ঞ্জের সাগর ॥

হেন দুষ্টমতি চোরে উচিত কি তব
 এ শয়ন- বীরবীর্যে সর্বভূক্সম
 দুর্বীর সংগ্রামে তুমি ? উঠ, ভীষ্মবাহু,
 রঘুকুলজয়কেতু ! অসহায় আমি
 তোমা বিনা, যথা রথী শূন্যচক্র রথে !
 তোমার শয়নে হনু বলহীন, বলি,
 গুণহীন ধনুঃ যথা ; বিলাপে বিষাদে
 অঙ্গদ ; বিখল মিতা সুগ্রীব সুমতি,
 অধীর করুরোত্তম বিতীর্ণ রথী,
 ব্যাকুল এ বলীদল ! উঠ, ঘরা করি,
 জুড়াও নয়ন, তাই, নয়ন উন্মীলি !
 'কিন্তু জ্ঞান যদি তুমি এ দুরন্ত রণে,
 ধনুর্ধর, চল ফিরি যাই বনবাসে ।
 নাহি কাজ, প্রিয়ভ্রম, সীতায় উদ্ধারি,-
 অভাগিনী ! নাহি কাজ বিনাশি রাবসে ।
 তনয়-বৎসলা যথা সুমিত্রা জননী
 কাঁদেন সরযুতীরে, কেমনে দেখাব
 এ মুখ, লক্ষণ, আমি, তুমি না ফিরিলে
 সঙ্গে মোর ? কি কহিব, সুধিবেন যবে
 মাতা, "কোথা, রামভদ্র, নয়নের মণি
 আমার, অনুজ তোর ?" কি বলে বুঝাব
 উর্মিলা বধূরে আমি, পুরবাসী জনে ?
 উঠ, বৎস ! আজি কেন বিমুখ হে তুমি
 সে ভ্রাতার অনুরোধে, যার প্রেমবশে,
 রাজ্যভোগ ত্যজি তুমি পশিলা কাননে ।
 সমদুঃখে সদা তুমি কাঁদিতে হেরিলে
 অশ্রুস্রব এ নয়ন ; মুছিতে ফতনে
 অশ্রুধারা ; ভিত্তি এবে নয়নের জলে
 আমি, তবু নাহি তুমি চাহ মোর পানে,
 প্রাণাধিক ? হে লক্ষণ, এ আচার কভু
 (সুভাতুবৎসল তুমি বিদিত জগতে !)
 সাজে কি তোমারে, তাই, চিরানন্দ তুমি
 আমার ! আজন্ম আমি ধর্মে লক্ষ্য করি,
 পূজিনু দেবতাকূলে,- দিলা কি দেবতা
 এই ফল, হে রজনি, দয়াময়ী তুমি,
 শিশির-আসারে নিত্য সরস কুসুমে,
 নিদাখ্যাত, প্রাণদান দেহ এ প্রসূনে ।

কাঁপ দিব জলে আমি সমুদ্র তিতর ।

এত বলি কান্দে রাম শশোক অশ্রুত ॥

(পৃ. ৫১৯)

রামের এই প্রবণতা-ভীতুতা, কাপুরুষতা বা কেবল নিরাশা, যাই বান-না কেন-সেটা মাইকেলের হাতে সৃষ্টি হয়নি, কৃত্তিবাসের রামের পতাবের মধ্যে ছিল ।

লক্ষণের আচরণে একটি-তবে অনেকের ধারণায় ক্ষমাহীন একটি ত্রুটি 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' দেখানো হয় । তিনি অশ্রুহীন মেঘনাদকে যুদ্ধের জন্য সাজতে না দিয়ে মেরেছেন । একেবারে গোড়ার দিক থেকে এই ত্রুটির প্রতিযোগ মাইকেলের কাছে জানানো হয়েছে । রাজনারায়ণ বসুকে পাঠানো চিঠিতে মাইকেল লেখেন : 'I have not yet heard a single line in Meghnad's disfavour. The great Jotindra b... and that, he is sorry poor Lakshman is represented as killing Indrajit in cold blood and when unarmed.' ! ১৭

লক্ষণ আসলে • কি করলেন ? চণ্ডীদেবীর কাছ থেকে তিনি পরামর্শ, মায়াজাল-যাতে তিনি ও বিতীষণ রাক্ষসদের কাছে অদৃশ্য থাকতে পারেন-এবং দৈব অস্ত্র পেয়েছেন । আরেকটি দৈব-অস্ত্র তাঁর ভাইয়ের কাছ থেকে প্রাপ্ত, যেটি ইন্দ্র দ্বিতীয় সর্গে রামের কাছে পাঠিয়েছিলেন । তারপর যজ্ঞাগারে লক্ষণ আর বিতীষণ অগ্রসর হন । লক্ষণ যজ্ঞাগারে ঢুকলে মেঘনাদ প্রথমে তাঁকে চিনতে পারেননি । পরে লক্ষণকে চিনতে পেরে তিনি যুদ্ধের জন্য সাজতে চান । মাইকেলের মেঘনাদ বলেন :

'... সংগ্রাম-সাধ অবশ্য মিটার

মহাহবে আমি তবে, বিরত কি কভু

রণরঙ্গে ইন্দ্রজিৎ ? আতিথেয় সেবা,

তিষ্ঠি, লহ, শূরশ্রেষ্ঠ, প্রথমে এ ধামে-

রক্ষোরিণু তুমি, তবু অতিধি হে এবে ।

সাজি বীরসাজে আমি । নিরস্ত্র যে অরি,

নহে রথীকুলপ্রথা আঘাতিতে তারে ।

এ বিধি, হে বীরবর, অবিন্দিত নহে,

ক্ষত্র ভুঙ্গি, তব কাছে ; - কি আর কহিব ?' (৬: ৪৭৫-৪৮৩)

লক্ষণ তাকে যেতে দেন না । মনে রাখতে হবে, কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণে মেঘনাদ তিনবার রাম-লক্ষণের সঙ্গে যুদ্ধ করেন । এই হচ্ছে তৃতীয়বার । প্রথম দুবার রাম এবং লক্ষণ, দুজন মিলে মেঘনাদের হাতে পরাজিত হন । এইবার 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' লক্ষণ যখন তাঁকে অস্ত্র যোগাড় করার জন্য বাইরে যেতে দেন না তখন মেঘনাদ ভদ্রতা এতায় না রেখে গালাগালি দিতে লাগলেন । 'ক্ষত্রকুলস্থানি, শত ধিক্ তোরে / লক্ষণ ! নিরলঙ্কার তুমি ।..... / পামর ! কে তোরে হেথা অগ্নিনি দূর্মতি ?' (৬ : ৪৯২-৫০০) এই বলতেই মেঘনাদ আক্রমণ করেন ।

চক্ষের নিমিষে কোথা তুলি ভীমবাহু

নিষ্কেপিল ঘোর নাদে লক্ষ্যের গিরে ।

পাড়িলা ভূতলে এলী ভীম প্রহরণে,

পড়ে ওড়রাজ যথা স্তম্ভজননগরে

এমন লক্ষণে মোর মারিল রাক্ষসে ।
 আর না ঘাইব আমি অযোধ্যার দেশে ॥
 পিতৃ আজ্ঞা হৈল মোরে দিতে ছত্রদণ্ড ।
 কৈকেয়ী সত্যই তাহে হইল পাখণ্ড ॥
 পিতৃসত্য পালিতে আইনু বনবাস ।
 নিধি বাদী হৈল, এই তাহে সর্বনাশ ॥
 অশুরীকে ডাকি বলে যত দেবগণ ।
 না কাম্দ না কাম্দ রাম পাইবে লক্ষণ ॥
 ভাই ভাই বলে রাম ছাড়েন নিশ্বাস ।

শ্রীরামের বিলাপ রচিল কৃতিবাস ॥

(পৃ. ৪৭০-৪৭১)

উভয় কবির লেখা থেকে উদ্ধৃতিতে সীতার কথা উঠেছে । দুটোতে রাম আবেগবশত বলেন যে স্ত্রীকে উদ্ধার করা যাবে না । শুধু তা নয়, স্ত্রীকে না পাওয়াটা তাঁকে মেনে নিতে হবে অথবা তাঁর মেনে নেয়া উচিত ছিল । এমন মনোভাব একাধিকবার উচ্চারিত হয়, 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' এবং কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে । যেমন ধরুন, কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে যখন বিত্তীয়গের ছেলে ভরগীসেন বিষ্ণুর অবতার রামকে স্তুতি করতে করতে মারা যায় তখন লঙ্কার যুদ্ধ সম্বন্ধে রামের অসম্ভুতি জাগে ।

কৃতিবাস বলেন :

শ্রীরাম বলেন শুন মিত্র বিত্তীয়গ ।
 লঙ্কাতে এমন ভক্ত জানিনু এখন ॥
 কেমনে মারিব অস্ত্র ইহার উপর ।
 এত বলি ত্যজিলা হাতের ধনুঃশর ॥
 রাম বলে বিত্তীয়গ বলি হে তোমারে ।
 কেমন ধরিব প্রাণ এ ভক্তেরে মেরে ॥
 অকারণে করিলাম সাগর বন্ধন ।
 ত্যজিয়া লঙ্কার যুদ্ধ পুনঃ ঘাই বন ।
 যত যুদ্ধ করিলাম শ্রম হৈল সার ।
 বুঝিলাম না হইল সীতার উদ্ধার ॥
 কার্য নাই সীতা আমি না ঘাব রাজ্যেতে ।

কেমনে মারিব বাণ ভক্তের অঙ্গেতে ॥

(পৃ. ৪৩৪)

পরে রাম যখন দেবীর পূজা করছেন এবং প্রয়োজনীয় অর্ঘ্য পাচ্ছেন না তখন ক্ষণস্থায়ী ভাবে তিনি হতাশ হয়ে যান । কৃতিবাস বলেন :

শ্রীরাম কহেন সব কিবা দেখ আর ।
 বুঝিনু নিশ্চয় সীতা না হবে উদ্ধার ॥
 যাহ মিতা সুগ্রীব গগণে লয়ে যাও ।
 মিছে আর কেন কাদ মিছে মুখ ঢাও ।
 বিত্তীয়গে রাজ্য দিল অযোধ্যা জুগলেন ।
 রাধিষন যতনে তাকে পড়োর পালনেন ॥

গিয়ে মেঘনাদের সামনে দাঁড়ায় ও যজ্ঞ থামিয়ে দেয় ॥ কৃতিবাস বলেন :

ইন্দ্রজিতে দেখিয়া হনুর কোপ বাড়ে ।

এক লাফে পড়ে গিয়া যজ্ঞকুণ্ড পাড়ে ।

সম্মুখে দণ্ডায় বীর পরম সজ্জানী ।

বৃক্ষাঘাতে নিভায়ে সে যজ্ঞের আগুনি ॥

হনুমান বীর যেন সিংহের প্রতাপ ।

যজ্ঞকুণ্ড তরি তার করলি প্রসাব ॥

যজ্ঞকুণ্ড উপরেতে হনুমান মুতে ।

ফল ফুল যজ্ঞের তাদিয়া যায় স্রোতে ॥

যজ্ঞ দ্রব্য ছড়াইয়া ফেলে চারিতিতে ।

দেখি ফোথে সংগ্রামে সাজিল ইন্দ্রজিতে ॥ (পৃ. ৪৫৭)

মেঘনাদ সাজলেও বীর লক্ষণ নয়, হনুমান তাঁকে পুরোপুরি তৈরি হতে দেয় না ।

সাজুক বা না-সাজুক ব্রহ্মার বিধান অনুযায়ী মেঘনাদের মৃত্যু সেই দিনই অনিবার্য ॥

তা জেনেও যুদ্ধ করতে করতে কৃতিবাসের লক্ষণ একবার ভয় পেয়ে যান ।

মেঘনাদ মায়া দেখি চিন্তিত লক্ষণ ।

হেন কালে লক্ষণেরে কন বিভীষণ ॥

বিভীষণ বলে তুমি না হও চিন্তিত ।

এখনি মরিবে বেটা দুষ্ট ইন্দ্রজিৎ ॥ (পৃ. ৪৫৯)

যুদ্ধের মধ্যে কৃতিবাসের মেঘনাদ একবার লঙ্কা-পুরীর মাঝখানে রাক্ষসদের কাছে

পালাতে চান । যেমন ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে’ যখন অস্ত্রাগারে ঢোকার ইচ্ছে করেন

তেমনি এখানে কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে বিভীষণ কাকা তাঁকে যেতে দেন না । কৃতিবাস

বলেন :

ইন্দ্রজিৎ পলাইয়া লঙ্কা যেতে চাহে ।

চাপিয়া লঙ্কার দ্বার বিভীষণ রহে ॥

বিভীষণ বলে বাছা আজি যাবে কোথা ।

এখনি লক্ষণ তোর কাটিবেন মাথা ॥

শীঘ্র এস লক্ষণ ডাকেন বিভীষণ ।

স্বরা করি দুষ্ট বেটার বধহ জীবন ॥

বিভীষণ বচনে লক্ষণ আগুয়ান ।

ইন্দ্রজিৎ কাছে গেল পুরিয়া সজ্জান ॥ (পৃ. ৪৬০)

যুদ্ধের চূড়ান্ত পর্যায়ে কৃতিবাসের লক্ষণের বাইরে থেকে একটু সাহায্যও দরকার

নয় । মাইকেলের লক্ষণ যজ্ঞাগারে যাবার আগে তাঁর সব ক’টা প্রয়োজনীয় অস্ত্র পেয়ে

গিয়েছিলেন । কৃতিবাসের লক্ষণ যুদ্ধের মধ্যে একটা পান ।

লক্ষণ অশক্ত হৈল প্রহরার ঘায় ।

বৃক্ষা বলে পুরন্দর করহ উপায় ॥

এক অস্ত্র পুরন্দর করিলেন দান ।

লক্ষণ সে এক অস্ত্র পূরিল সজ্জান ॥ (পৃ. ৪৬০)

আর কয়েক চরণ পরে লক্ষণ ওই সদ্যপ্রাপ্ত দৈব অস্ত্র দিয়ে মেঘনাদের মুণ্ড কেটে

মড়মড়ে ! দেব-অস্ত্র বাজিল ঝন্ঝনি,
কাঁপিল দেউল যেন ঘোর ভূকম্পনে !
বহিল ধুধির ধারা !

(৬: ৫০১-৫০৭)

মেঘনাদ লক্ষণের অস্ত্র তুলতে গিয়ে পারেন না । তার পর তাঁর খুল্লতাত বিভীষণকে দরজায় দাঁড়িয়ে থাকতে দেখেন । কাকার সঙ্গে দু-চারটে কথা বলার পর তিনি আত্মা দেন :

'...ছাড় দার, যাব অঙ্গাগারে,
পাঠাইব রামানুজ গমন-ভবনে,
লঙ্কার কলঙ্ক আজি ভঞ্জিব আহবে ।'

(৬: ৫২৮-৫৩৩)

বিভীষণ দরজা ছাড়েন না । তার পরে বিভীষণ আর মেঘনাদের মধ্যে কথোপকথন হয় । তৎক্ষণ লক্ষণ অজ্ঞান ছিলেন । তার পর :

হেথায় চেতন পাই মায়ার হতনে
সৌমিত্রি, হুস্তারে ধনুঃ টঙ্কারিলা বলী ।
সঙ্কানি বিক্লিলা গুর খরতর শরে
অরিন্দম ইন্দ্রজিতে,...

অধীর ব্যথায় রুঘী, সাপটি সম্বরে
শব্দ, ঘণ্টা, উপহারপাত্র ছিল যত
যজ্ঞাগারে, একে একে নিক্ষেপিলা কোপে;

...
কিন্দু মায়াময়ী মায়, বাহু-প্রসরণে,
ফেলাইলা দূরে সব, জননী যেমতি
খেদান মশকবন্দে সুস্ত সুত হতে
করপদ্ম সকালনে !

এবং শেষে :

তাজি ধনুঃ নিক্ষেপিলা অসি মহাতেজাঃ
রামানুজ ; ঝলসিলা ফলক-আলোকে
নয়ন ! হায় রে, অন্ধ অরিন্দম বগী
ইন্দ্রজিৎ, খড়্গাঘাতে পড়িলা ভূতলে
শোণিতার্ধ্র ।

(৬: ৫৯১-৬২৪)

তার পরে আস্তে আস্তে মেঘনাদ মরে যান ।

কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে মেঘনাদ কিভাবে মারা যান ? মায়্যা-চণ্ডীদেবীর হানে বিভীষণ নিজেই মেঘনাদকে হত্যার উপায় রাম-লক্ষণের কাছে বুঝিয়ে দেন । মেঘনাদকে তাঁর নিকুন্ডিলা যজ্ঞ শেষ অবধি করতে না দেওয়া হলে সেদিন তিনি পরাজিত হয়ে মরবেনই মরবেন । ব্রহ্মা আগে সেইরকম ব্যবস্থা করে নিয়েছেন । এই আত্মসজ্জনক সুসংবাদ পেলেও কৃতিবাসীর রাম লক্ষণকে পাঠাতে ইতস্তত করেন । বিভীষণ তখন রামকে ভরসা দিয়ে বলেন যে তাঁরা দুজনে একা যাবেন না, হনুমানরাও যাবে । 'আসলে বীর লক্ষণের বদলে হনুমান প্রথমে সাহস করে এগিয়ে

‘ইংরাজি শিক্ষার বীজ অতীত ভারতের ক্ষেত্রে প্রথমে বপন করলেও, তার চারা ভুলে বাংলার মাটিতে বসাতে হবে, নইলে স্বদেশী সাহিত্যের ফুল ফুটবে না। পশ্চিমের প্রাণবায়ু যে ভাবের বীজ বহন করে আনছে, তা দেশের মাটিতে শিকড় গাড়াতে পারছে না বলে, হয় শুকিয়ে যাচ্ছে, নয় পরগাছা হচ্ছে। এই কারণেই “মেঘনাদবধ” কাব্য পরগাছার ফুল। “অর্কিড”-এর মত তার আকারের অপূর্ণতা এবং বর্ণের গোরব থাকলেও, তার সৌরভ নেই।’ ১৯ মাইকেলের কাব্যে নতুনত্ব, নতুন পদার্থ, নতুন আমেজ আছে বলে অস্বীকার করা যায় না। সুশিক্ষিত, বহুভাষাবিদ, উৎকৃষ্ট সাহিত্যিক মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্ত-দ্বারা পাশ্চাত্য সাহিত্য থেকে অনেক কিছু আশ্রয় নি করা হয়েছে তাও সত্য এবং স্বীকৃত। তবে কী আর কী ভাবে করা হয়েছে তা এখনো, আমার মনে হয়, আলোচ্য বিষয়।

মধুসূদন যে আধুনিক বাংলার কবিতার প্রজাপতি তা আজকাল সর্বজনস্বীকৃত। ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য’ প্রকাশের পর থেকেই বাংলা সাহিত্যের গর্ভ। তবে কেউ কেউ, রবীন্দ্রনাথ-প্রমুখ, ‘মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য’-এর নিন্দাও করে গেছেন। রবীন্দ্রনাথের মতে মাইকেলের তথাকথিত ‘এপিক্’ তো এপিক্‌ই নয়। ‘হেমবাহুর ব্রতসংহারকে আমরা এইরূপ নাম-মাত্র মহাকাব্য শ্রেণীতে গণ্য করি না, কিন্তু মাইকেলের মেঘনাদবধকে আমরা তাহার অধিক আর কিছু বলিতে পারি না।’ এবং রামাদি চরিত্রের সম্বন্ধে সেই প্রবন্ধে লেখেন : ‘গ্রীসীয়দিগের সহিত যুদ্ধে ট্রয়নগরীর ধ্বংস-ঘটনায় গ্রীসীয়দিগের জাতীয় গৌরব কীর্তিত হয়— গ্রীসীয় কবি হোমরকে সেই জাতীয় গৌরবকল্পনায় উদ্দীপিত করিয়াছিল, কিন্তু মেঘনাদবধে বর্ণিত ঘটনায় কোন্‌খানে সেই উদ্দীপনী মূলশক্তি লক্ষিত হয় আমরা জানিতে চাই। দেখিতেছি মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে ঘটনার মহত্ত্ব নাই, একটা মহৎ অনুষ্ঠানের বর্ণনা নাই। তেমন মহৎ চরিত্রও নাই। কার্য দেখিয়াই আমরা চরিত্র কল্পনা করিয়া লই। যেখানে মহৎ অনুষ্ঠানের বর্ণনা নাই সেখানে কী আশ্রয় করিয়া মহৎ চরিত্র দাঁড়াইতে পারিবে! মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যের পাত্রগণের চরিত্রে অনন্যসাধারণতা নাই, অমরতা নাই। মেঘনাদবধের রাবণে অমরতা নাই, রামে অমরতা নাই, লক্ষ্মণে অমরতা নাই, এমন-কি ইন্দ্রজিতেও অমরতা নাই। মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যের কোনো পাত্র আমাদের সুখদুঃখের সহচর হইতে পারেন না, আমাদের কার্যের প্রবর্তক-নিবর্তক হইতে পারেন না। কখনো কোনো অবস্থায় মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যের পাত্রগণ আমাদের স্মরণপথে পড়িবে না।... সেই-সকল অমর সহচর-সৃষ্টিই মহাকবিদের কাজ। এখন জিজ্ঞাসা করি, আমাদের চতুর্দিকব্যাপী সেই কবিকল্পনায় মাইকেল কয়জন নূতন অধিবাসীকে প্রেরণ করিয়াছেন? না যদি করিয়া থাকেন, তবে তাঁহার কোন্‌ লেখাটাকে মহাকাব্য বল?’ ২০

মাইকেলের ইন্দ্রজিতে অমরতা নেই তা হয়তো আজকের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে বোঝা যায় ভুল। বাঙালি হিন্দু সমাজে ইন্দ্রজিৎ তো অমর, জীবিত আছেন। বাম্পীকির বা কুঁওবাসের রাক্ষসাস্বা ইন্দ্রজিৎ নয় কিন্তু। আধুনিক সমাজে মধুসূদনের বীরাস্বা ইন্দ্রজিৎ জীবনময় সহচর হিসেবে রয়েছেন। বিজ্ঞানী মেঘনাদ সাহার নাম সবার জানা আছে। নাট্যকার বাদল সরকারের ইন্দ্রজিৎও আমাদের মনের জগতে বেঁচে আছে। তা ছাড়া সত্যি একজন জ্যোতিষ জীবন্ত জীবিত পুরুষ মানুষকে ইন্দ্রজিৎ নামে গ্রামিণ এবং অনেকে বিনামূল্যে চেনেন। মাইকেলের কাব্যের আবির্ভাবের আগে ইন্দ্রজিৎ/মেঘনাদ নামক কোনো ব্যক্তি ছিল কি, বঙ্গদেশে?

ফেলেন, মাইকেলের লক্ষণও দৈব-অস্ত্র ব্যবহার করেন। যেমন কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে, তেমনি 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' দৈব সাহায্য ছাড়া লক্ষণ মেঘনাদকে হত্যা করতে পারতেন না।

মাইকেল মেঘনাদের মুখে নানান কথা বসিয়ে দেন। তা সত্ত্বেও কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে যা লক্ষণ করেন, প্রায় তাই করা হয় 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে'। অবশ্যই কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে যেখানে অসংখ্য হনুমান সৈন্যের সাহায্যে বীর লক্ষণ তাঁর প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীকে মারতে যান, সেখানে 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' লক্ষণ এবং বিতীষণ একলা গমন করেন। তা কোন্ কাব্যে বীর্য বেশি? অধিকন্তু কৃতিবাসের লক্ষণ ও মাইকেলের রামানুজকে পাশাপাশি রাখলে কোনো মূলগত পরিবর্তন কি দেখা যায়?

চরিত্রের রূপান্তর ছাড়া 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' নিয়তি বা 'ফেট'-এর কথা আর পাশ্চাত্য থেকে আমদানিকৃত 'ট্রাজেডি' সম্বন্ধে কথা উঠেছে। আবু হেনা মোস্তাফা কামাল একটা প্রবন্ধে 'ভিলোডমা সম্বন্ধ' ও 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য' চমৎকার ভাবে তুলনা করেন। সেই প্রবন্ধের শেষ দিকে তিনি ট্রাজেডির কথা বলেন:

'ভিলোডমাসম্বন্ধে নিয়তি বা বিধির পরিকল্পনা গ্রীক নেমেসিসের ওপরে বিন্যস্ত হলেও মধুসূদন তাতে পাশ্চাত্য প্রাণ প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে পারেননি। সেই আরক দায়িত্ব তিনি মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে পালন করেছেন। বিপুল ঐশ্বর্যের অধিকারী, বীর পুত্রের জনক, প্রজারঞ্জক রাজা রাবণ 'যে-নিয়তির দ্বারা তাড়িত ও লাক্ষিত তার উৎস গ্রীক ট্রাজেডি। রামায়ণ ও মহাভারতে যথাক্রমে রাম-লক্ষণ ও যুধিষ্ঠিরাদির দুঃখভোগের কাহিনী আছে বটে, তবে তাঁরা কেউ নিঃসঙ্গ ছিলেন না-ভাগ্যফলকে মেনে নিয়েও তাঁরা দৈব অনুগ্রহ ভোগ করেছেন। কিন্তু রাবণ যেন রাজা ইডিপাসের মতোই নির্বাক-নাটকের জটিলতম অঙ্কে তিনি একা-সবাই তাঁর মুখাপেক্ষী, কেউ তাঁর অবলম্বন নয় এবং সহোদর বিতীষণ থেকে আরাধ্য মহাদেব পর্যন্ত সকলেই তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে।' ১৮

রাম-লক্ষণ-যুধিষ্ঠিরের 'চাইতে বোধহয় মাইকেলের রাবণ 'নাটকের জটিলতম অঙ্কে' নিঃসঙ্গ। হতে পারে তিনি ঠিক ইডিপাসের মতো নির্বাক-ব। তবে মাইকেলের রাবণ কৃতিবাসের রাবণের সঙ্গে তুলনা করলে দেখা যায় যে নির্বাক-নিঃসঙ্গতা সংক্রান্ত যেমন কৃতিবাসের রাবণ তেমনি মাইকেলের রাবণ। উভয় কাব্যে রাবণের পুত্রগণ তাঁর তীষণ পক্ষপাতী। উভয় কাব্যে তারা পিতাকে ত্যাগ করে পরলোকে চলে যায়। উভয় কাব্যে সহোদর বিতীষণ তাঁর মুখাপেক্ষী। উভয় কাব্যে আরাধ্য শিব-শক্তি শেষ পর্যন্ত তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে।

কৃতিবাসী রামায়ণে মেঘনাদের মৃত্যুর পর এবং রামের সঙ্গে যুদ্ধ করার আগে রাবণ দেবীকে পূজা করে অভয় দান পান। তবে তার পরেই রাম পূজা করে দেবীর সহায়তা লাভ করেন-অগত্যা রাবণকে ছেড়ে রামকে দেবী তাঁর দয়া আরোপ করেন। 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যে' দেবীর উপরোধে তাঁর স্বামী মহাদেব রাবণকে ছেড়ে রামের পক্ষে সরে আসেন। কৃতিবাসের রাবণ-এমন-কি বাণ্মীকির রাবণ একা, নিঃসঙ্গ, ইডিপাসের মতো নির্বাক-বলে আমরা কি বলতে পারি যে কৃতিবাস ও বাণ্মীকি পাশ্চাত্য ট্রাজেডিতে যুব, প্রভাবিত?

'মাইকেল ধর্ম যদি বা প্রভাবিত হন, তবে তার ফলে যে পাঠকের তুল ফুটানেন সেটি কি একদম অবলম্বন বা অভ্যর্থনা? প্রথম দীর্ঘতী বোধহয় তাই মনে করলেন:

১৮. আবু হেনা মোস্তাফা কামাল, 'শিঙ্গীর রূপাণ্ডর', ঢাকা, বর্ণমিছিল, ১৯৭৫, পৃ ৭১-৭২।

১৯. প্রমথ চৌধুরী, 'সবুজপত্রের মুখপত্র', 'নানা কথা'য় অন্তর্ভুক্ত, কলকাতা, লেখককৃত, (১৯১৯), পৃ ১০৯-১০।

২০. রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর, 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য', 'রবীন্দ্র-রচনাবলী', অচলিত সংগ্রহ, পৃ ৭৮, ৭৯।

রবীন্দ্রনাথ 'ভারতী'তে (১২৮৯) এটি ছাপান যখন তাঁর বয়েস মাত্র একুশ। পাঁচ বছর আগে তাঁর দ্বারা 'ভারতী'র 'প্রথম সংখ্যা থেকে যষ্ঠ সংখ্যা পর্যন্ত ধারাবাহিক ভাবে প্রকাশিত সুদীর্ঘ সমালোচনায় মধুসূদনের কবি-মহিমাকে প্রায় ধূলিসাৎ করে দেওয়া হলো।' (অমিতাভ গুপ্ত, 'কবি মধুসূদন দত্ত এবং ছিন্নমূল আমরা', 'গান্ধেশ পত্র', ফাল্গুন, ১৩৮৩, পৃ ৫১)। পরে মেনে নেন : 'ইতিপূর্বেই আমি অরবিন্দসের স্পর্ধার বেগে মেঘনাদবধের একটি তীব্র সমালোচনা লিখিয়াছিলাম। কাঁচা আমের রসটা অল্পরস-কাঁচা সমালোচনাও গালিগালাজ। অন্য ক্ষমতা যখন কম থাকে তখন খোঁচা দিবার ক্ষমতাটা খুব তীক্ষ্ণ হইয়া উঠে। আমিও এই অমর কাব্যের উপর নখরাঘাত করিয়া নিজেকে অমর করিয়া তুলিবার সর্বাপেক্ষা সুলভ উপায় অগ্রেষণ করিতেছিলাম। এই দাস্তিক সমালোচনাটা দিয়া আমি ভারতীতে প্রথম লেখা আরম্ভ করিলাম।' ('জীবনস্মৃতি', 'রবীন্দ্র-রচনাবলী', সপ্তদশ খণ্ড, কলকাতা, বিশ্বভারতী, ১৩৭১, পৃ ৩৫৪)। আরো পরে ছেয়ট্রি বছর বয়েসে যখন সাহিত্যের গুরুদেব হয়ে বিচিত্রা ভবনে সাহিত্যে নতুনবের বিষয়ে স্বল্পবয়েসী 'কল্লোল' এবং প্রতি'কল্লোল'দের বুঝিয়ে-টুঝিয়ে বক্তৃতা দিচ্ছিলেন তখন মধুসূদনের কথা তুললেন : 'আধুনিক বাংলা কাব্যসাহিত্য শুরু হয়েছে মধুসূদন দত্ত থেকে। তিনিই প্রথমে ভাঙনের এবং সেই ভাঙনের ভূমিকার উপরে গড়নের কাজে-লেগেছিলেন খুব সাহসের সঙ্গে। ক্রমে ক্রমে নয়, ধীরে ধীরে নয়। পূর্বকার ধারাকে সম্পূর্ণ এড়িয়ে তিনি এক মুহূর্তেই নতুন পন্থা নিয়েছিলেন। এ যেন এক ভূমিকম্পে একটা ভাঙা উঠে পড়ল জলের ভিতর থেকে। তার পরে, প্রমথ চৌধুরীর ন্যায়, তিনি লেখেন : 'এ কথা সত্য, বাংলাসাহিত্যে মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য তার দোহার পেল না। সম্পূর্ণ একলা রয়ে গেল। অর্থাৎ, মাইকেল বাংলাভাষায় এমন একটি পথ খুলেছিলেন যে পথে ক্লেবলমাত্র তাঁরই একটিমাত্র মহাকাব্যের রথ চলেছিল। তিনি বাংলাভাষার স্বভাবকে মেলে চলেননি। তাই তিনি যে-ফল ফলালেন তাতে বীজ ধরল না, তাঁর লেখা সন্ততিহীন হল, উপযুক্ত বংশাবলী সৃষ্টি করল না।' ('সাহিত্যের পথে', 'রবীন্দ্র-রচনাবলী', ত্রয়োবিংশ খণ্ডে অন্তর্ভুক্ত, কলকাতা, বিশ্বভারতী, ১৩৬৫, পৃ ৪৯৩, ৪৯৪)। কৃতি স্বীকার করলেও তা থেকে বলা যায় না যে রবীন্দ্রনাথ মাইকেলের পক্ষপাতী পুরোপুরি হয়েছিলেন কখনো।

তথ্যনির্দেশ

১. ক্রেত্র গুপ্ত, 'কবি মধুসূদন ও তাঁর পত্রাবলী' (কলকাতা, গ্রন্থ নিলয়, ১৩৭০), পৃ ১৫৩।
২. ঐ, পৃ ১৪৬।
৩. সুরেশচন্দ্র মৈত্র-দ্বারা উদ্ধৃত, মৈত্র, 'মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্ত : জীবন ও সাহিত্য' (কলকাতা, পুঁথিপত্র, ১৯৭৫), পৃ ১৮৭।
৪. ঐ, পৃ ১৮৮।
৫. মোহিতলাল মজুমদার, 'কবি মধুসূদন' (কলকাতা, বিদ্যোদয় লাইব্রেরী, ৩য় সং, ১৯৭৫), পৃ ৪৪-৪৫।
৬. নীলিমা ইব্রাহিম, 'বাংলার কবি মধুসূদন' (ঢাকা, নওরোজ কিতাবিস্তান, ৩য় সং, ১৯৭৮), পৃ ৫৬।
৭. মৈত্র, 'মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্ত', পৃ. ১৯২।
৮. মোবাস্থের আলী, 'মধুসূদন ও নবজাগৃতি' (ঢাকা, মুক্তধারা, ৩য় সং, ১৯৮১), পৃ ৯১।
৯. মৈত্র, 'মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্ত', পৃ ১৯৭। আর-এক দক্ষিণ ভারতীয় সাহিত্যে, জৈনদের কন্নড় ভাষায় লিখিত রামায়ণে রাবণের মনুষ্য আর বীরর বৈশ প্রত্যক্ষভাবে অঙ্কিত হয়। (প্র : এ. কে. রামানুজ, "300 Ramayanas : 5 Examples and 3 Thoughts," South Asia Workshop on Text and Interpretation, the University of Chicago, February 6, 1987.)। তবে মধুসূদনের যে কবির জৈনদের রামায়ণের সঙ্গে পরিচয় ছিল কিনা তা আমরা জানি না। তাঁর চিঠিপত্রে যেখানে ব্যাস, বিশ্বনাথ, কালিদাস, 'বান্মীকি প্রভৃতির নাম পাওয়া যায় সেখানে কবির উল্লেখ নেই, জৈন রামায়ণও অনুপস্থিত। 'মেঘনাদবধ কাব্যের চতুর্থ সর্গে যেখানে বান্মীকি, ভর্তৃহরি, ভবভূতি, কালিদাস, মুরালি, ও কৃত্তিবাসের নামের সামনে তিনি প্রণাম করেন, সেখানেও কবির উল্লেখ নেই।
১০. নয়নচন্দ্র মুখোপাধ্যায় সম্পাদিত, 'সচিত্র কৃত্তিবাসী রামায়ণ' (এলাহাবাদ, ইন্ডিয়ান প্রেস পাবলিকেশন্স, কলিকাতা, ইন্ডিয়ান পাবলিশিং হাউস, ১৩৩৯), পৃ ৪৫০। এর পর থেকে পৃষ্ঠা প্রবন্ধেই উল্লিখিত হবে।
১১. মৈত্র, 'মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্ত', পৃ ১৯৭।
১২. প্রমীলা চরিত্রের উৎপত্তি কথার জন্য দ্রষ্টব্য : যোগীন্দ্রনাথ বসু, 'মাইকেল মধুসূদন দত্তের জীবন-চরিত', (কলিকাতা, চক্রবর্তী, চাটার্জি অ্যান্ড কোং লি., ৫ম সং, ১৯২৫), পৃ ৩৬২-৬৭।
১৩. ঐ, পৃ ৬৫২।
১৪. প্রমথনাথ বিনী, 'বাংলা সাহিত্যের নরনারী' (কলকাতা, মৈত্রী, ১৩৬০), পৃ ২৫।
১৫. মোবাস্থের আলী, 'মধুসূদন ও নবজাগৃতি', পৃ ২১৬।
১৬. ঐ, পৃ ১১৩। আগে রবীন্দ্রনাথ বলেছিলেন যে মাইকেল 'রামকে হীলোকের অপেক্ষা ভীষণ বানিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন।' ('মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য', 'রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী', প্রচলিত সংগ্রহ : দ্বিতীয় খণ্ডে অন্তর্ভুক্ত, কলকাতা, বিশ্বভারতী, ১৩৬৯, পৃ ৮০)।
১৭. গুপ্ত, 'কবি মধুসূদন ও তাঁর পত্রাবলী', পৃ ১৫৭।

them by offering the false comforts of a logocentric reading. But as it happens, like many other words, the word 'pornography' had its beginning in the nineteenth century. Annette Kuhn has rightly pointed out: '... despite the fact that pornography has existed under the name since about mid-nineteenth century, and depictions of erotic and sexual activity have been around—even if not called pornography—from time immemorial, such representations are by no means homogenous in terms either of their textual operations or of the cultural meanings they carried in the societies in which they were produced.'³ This observation has immediate implications for the production of Bengali pornography. Since Bengali pornography is printed, its clientele is by definition limited to the literate section of society: the bulk of its consumers are the middle-class, the sub-elite power group which is itself the product of colonial era. So to avoid displacing rules and categories of this specific discursive practice on to the pre-existing erotic or otherwise representations, it is imperative that we bracket off the latter from our purview.

It is also vitally important to emphasize the mode of circulation and exchange of pornography as the product is itself determined by these conditions. Even a casual reader knows that the texts sold in the market as pornography have rather simple and straight-forward narratives, mostly repetitive. For circulation to be maintained demand has to be ensured; and one source of the seductive appeal of pornography lies in the very strictures and controls that encircle it: 'exposed to the light of day, it risks a loss of power. Pornography invites policing.'⁴ The particular format, the quality of paper, the cover, the title, the surreptitious ways in which it is sold, that is, the entire package signals that here is something special, special precisely because it is forbidden by the powers that be. The term 'Pornography' not only demarcates a specific domain of texts, it also stands for the set of practices that makes its production and consumption possible. However, it will be foolhardy to think that the abolition of all control and censorship would inevitably lead to the end of pornography, for it is structured and determined by rather complex social needs and demands—needs and demands that cannot be tackled by mere legalist-reformist approaches.

The word 'pornography' is derived from the ancient Greek 'porne' and 'graphos'. 'Porne' means 'whore', specifically and exclusively the lowest class of whore, and 'graphos' means 'writing, etching or drawing'. Obviously the crucial question is: who is a whore? To answer the question, let us take a detour and look at the other forms that are not termed 'pornographic' as such. No matter where we turn—from the upper echelons of high art to the rank and file 'mass' literature, cinema or advertisements—we are, more often than not, confronted with certain recurrent motifs vis-a-vis women. The frequency and regularity of this recurrence suggests that there is a kind of complicity between texts,

THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BHADRALOKS : AN EXCURSION INTO PORNOTOPIA

Sibaji Bandyopadhyay

In no representation do we have a passive reflection of a pre-existing world. Every re-presentation is a production on its own right, constituting a highly coded discourse, structured according to a set of specific discursive rules and categories. In order to set apart 'pornography' as a particular form of representation, as a distinct discursive mode and practice, it becomes necessary to simultaneously relate and separate the representation from the world at large. One well-known line of argument regarding 'pornography' is offered by the champions of sexual libertarianism. They hold: in 'pornography', the world of pure fantasy, unrepressed desire is allowed full and free play, social taboos and strictures are transgressed and subverted by unmediated sexual impulse, all signifiers are systematically stripped of socially-determined parasitic signifieds and authoritarian rationalism is confronted and destroyed by blind irrationalism. In other words, the sexual libertarians take it for granted that while the 'reality principle' is oppressive, the 'pleasure principle' is emancipatory: the two are related undialectically—being self-sufficient and autonomous, the twain can never meet. By employing the figure of inversion, this mode of argument turns 'pornography' into an inverted 'other' of the world; the tacit assumption being, that after all representation is nothing but a reflection (in this case inverted) of a pre-existing world, one does not have to think through complex mediations in order to understand what pornography is all about: a kind of metaphysical essentialism becomes the hallmark of this school of thought. But to decontextualize is also to depoliticize; it is the well-known strategy by which texts are made to appear politically innocent and harmless. Myth, after all, as Roland Barthes put it, is depoliticized and dehistoricized speech.¹ The libertarian position is an example of an ideological account that treats pornography as a thing-in-itself, rather than as a form of social organization of sexually explicit representations.² In order to avoid such pitfalls, the best way is to adopt an approach that can enable us to handle the specificity and complexity of its different forms: its cultural variability, its diverse technologies and modes of production and consumption. In this paper, however, I restrict myself to a specific body of texts, the commonly available Bengali books that are popularly labelled as 'pornography'.

THE WORD

At the beginning was the word— to calm the qualms of discerning readers, I hasten to add, that by using this phrase, now outdated, I do not intend to dupe

WHORE-WOMAN

To clinch the issue of the 'whore', let us examine two pornographic texts. In heterosexual pornography, as in the other forms of representation, there are three basic units of relationship: one man - one woman, one man - two women, two men - one woman. The number of participants may increase, but all complex formations are built upon these three primary units.

One man - One woman: Sulalita is a bright student and a well-bred girl; she has impeccable taste in matters of culture; she disdains from reading either Harold Robbins or Samareesh Bose, does not listen to pop or disco music, is a great admirer of Rabindranath and Nazrul's songs. Her father, a top-ranking officer of a mercantile firm is a perfect gentleman. The boy next door, Narayan, is the son of a corrupt police official; he has lost his mother at an early age and has failed the Higher Secondary Examination thrice. The notions of propriety and impropriety that govern the text are sanctioned and consecrated by the official discourse of the *bhadraloks*. And since the woman is more faithful to the tenets of the discourse, she is projected as more 'cultured' than the man. But what the narrative proposes to do is to reverse the sign of inequality in favour of the man and restore the pristine imbalance, for when Sulalita is accosted by Narayan, whom she knows to be reckless and wild, she gives in willingly, without a protest or a murmur. The narrative aims at manipulating the reader's sympathy for the man: he is certainly depraved, but we must not forget that he has been deprived of motherly love and care and is a victim of circumstances. The obvious moral is: at worst, a man is what he is, is due to circumstances, but a woman is what she is, is because of her nature—on her nature, to use the words of Shakespeare, 'nurture can never stick', on whom pains no matter how humanely taken are bound to be 'all, all lost, quite lost.'

One man-Two women: Alok, a fifteen-year old boy is deeply infatuated with a middle-aged married woman named Roma. She is good-looking, wide-hearted and has the natural capacity to draw young persons of both sexes towards her. Alok adores Roma to the point of absurdity: she is almost a goddess in his eyes. Alok's high esteem for Roma prevents him from casting lewd glances at her, from passing obscene remarks about her shapely body. On the other hand, he is sexually drawn towards Chhaya, a girl of his age. Though Chhaya allows Alok to fondle her body, she never lets him overstep certain bounds. One day, exasperated at Alok's sentimental attitude towards Roma, Chhaya bursts out saying that Roma is bent on 'spoiling the boys, that she is only biding time to reveal her true colours to them. Disgusted at this outrageous remark, Alok immediately sets out for Roma's house. Looking at his face, Roma senses that something is wrong; when alone, she asks him to explain his disquiet. Unable to hold himself, Alok tells Roma of Chhaya's sudden outburst. Roma immediately seizes the opportunity to do exactly what Chhaya had

canonized and certified as cultural insignia and those treated as cultural embarrassments and derisively dismissed as 'popular'. What is more intriguing, such motif—motifs that conjoin to produce stable identities or icons—can be traced in different cultures and in different times. It goes without saying that specific connotations of such constructs can only be deciphered in relation to specific historical conjunctures and configurations, but that does not mean that one can simply wish away the common features, for to ignore them would be to miss the obvious. To emphasize linkages and connections between disparate elements is not necessarily to take a reductionist view of things. Generally speaking, there are two polar images of women : one, chaste, docile and obedient and the other, unchaste, vile and voluptuous—the two paradigmatic constructs being related by a schema of binary opposites. By valorizing the 'tame' woman at the cost of the other, hegemonic discursive practices formulate, and in turn, are formulated by an economy of morality. For a smooth running of the economy it is necessary to accommodate and absorb dissenting voices, ward off the dangers of the 'vile' woman. The two time-honoured strategies of neutralization are those of 'assimilation' and 'exclusion' : in the first case, the recalcitrant woman is finally purged of her vices and thereby tamed and framed in the image of the 'virtuous' woman, and in the second, she is pushed beyond the margins of permissible discourse, excommunicated, as it were. But since the economy of morality is grounded upon the opposition between the 'good' and the 'bad' woman, nor can it either afford a total obliteration, a complete erasure of the latter. To appropriate, if has to perforce produce new significations and posit new markers of difference. The ensuing slippage unsettles its conceptual categories and destabilizes the semiotic order : the threat of the 'unassimilated otherness' both impairs and activates hegemonic discourses, forces them to re-state their case *ad nauseum*. Since the economy of morality is organized by and around the principles of patriarchy, only a particular set of perspectives is designated as legitimate. But as the discourses that uphold the economy, are of necessity punctuated by gaps, ruptures that create 'dissenting spaces' and enclaves of contest, provide entry points to oppositional/ alternative forces, the privileged perspectives are always undercut. The more the undercutting, the more contentious and tensed becomes a text. The opposite also holds true : the tighter are the bonds between signifiers and signifieds, the more structured and stable is the meaning, but such relative smoothness and coherence is gained only at the expense of richness and density. The question is : are pornographic texts subject to vagaries of meaning, open to suggestions of play, or are they more closed on themselves, localized on certain 'unassailable and unambiguous truths'? The second alternative leads to an enigma : if pornography has no pretensions of fecundity, as far as the production of meanings is concerned, then how does one explain its appeal? After all, pornography not only promises pleasure, it also pleases many.

figure of the desubjectivized subject to remind the readers that the male sex can never be reduced to singular notions, the options open for men being always many. The 'whore-woman' acts both as a contrast and a constant point of reference for the construction of male-subjectivities, she becomes the perfect 'other' of all men. In pornography, while women abdicate men arrogate all history; the poverty of the former points to the plenitude of the latter.

In contrast to the other discursive practices, pornography eats the cake and keeps it too: woman is both docile and voluptuous at the same time; she is the tamed witch. The recurrent motifs of the other representations are conflated to produce a unified image of woman: the Janus-faced woman is transformed into a face-less woman. And the face-less woman in her turn becomes a mirror, as it were, in which the faces of different men are reflected and recognized. To assert his presence, a man is required to construe the woman as an absence, as an emptiness, as someone shorn of all individuality and personal identity, to be filled in at will.

LUST AND LANGUAGE

To disremember is to dismember. The violence of forgetting not only takes away the name from the woman it also maims her. The female body, in pornography, is split into parts, and the parts are enumerated and strictly itemized: the so-called erotic zones are over-privileged; clitoris, vagina, lips, breasts and hips are linked in a chain of metonymy. Rhetorically, the parcelling of body corresponds to the trope of synecdoche — the part for the whole and the whole for the part. The parcelling destroys all semblance of totality, renders the subject fragile and disperses her into the fragments that stand for her. What is remarkable about pornography is the way, lust and language converge in a single bodily member. As Maud Ellmann has put it in a different context, 'it betrays, between the text and sexuality, an intercourse more cunning than a rhyme.'⁵ Pornography works with the lowest of the low registers—the two /three-lettered words that stand for the genitals — both male and female — and other associated expletives constitute its central sign-matrix. The radical re-orientation of the verbal material displays an overall structure of symmetries, based on obsessive repetitions. The material, so organized, does not just *depict* a sexual act, it *is* the act. The words do not merely simulate or evoke paroxysm of desire, raptures of orgasm, they also create a network of internal relations, underlining pornography's relative autonomy.

Pornography then is a field of desire which induces linguistic orgasm; and there is a taxonomy peculiar to it that enable it to do so. Pornography delights in forbidden speech; the words prohibited by and expunged from the official discourse of the bhadraloks, 'bhadra' discourse for short, is used with an abundance in Bengali pornographic texts. But then does pornography circumvent the discourse—both censored and censoring and invade 'the

prophesied. Though initially taken aback, Alok does not take long to literally warm up to the game of sex. Thereafter, Roma being available for his regular use, Alok becomes totally indifferent to Chhaya. However, one day, they are rudely interrupted by her; Chhaya suddenly storms into the room in a furious state and threatens them with dire consequences for their misdemeanour. Roma, pouncing upon Chhaya, commands Alok to rape her. She says unless Chhaya is given what she is actually itching for, she will remain a deadly menace to them. Alok wastes no time in doing what he is told to do and Chhaya, though at first tries to resist Alok's assaults, gives in after a point and begins to respond positively to Alok's sexual ministrations. Chhaya's heart warms up to Roma and with a deep sense of gratitude she acknowledges the great service Roma has rendered her. With Chhaya cowed down, it now becomes possible for Alok to have smooth and simultaneous relations with two women.

Borrowing terms from Greimas' categories of characters, one may say that in pornography, for the male 'subject' to achieve his 'object,' that is, the fulfilment of sexual desire, all antagonisms between the 'helpers' and 'opponents', if they happen to be women, must cease; that unless or until they wish to be desexed, the women must co-operate with each other to expand the horizons of male sexuality. Roma not only introduces Alok to the mysteries of sex, she also shows up Chhaya for what she is. For men, to be initiated, is to know that all cleavages can be taken care of, that sexual victory guarantees all.

Who is a whore? Pornography is unflinching in its reply which is both straight-forward and breath-taking in its scope: all women, irrespective of race or religion, age or looks, caste, creed or class are whores. Pornography begins and ends with the fundamental postulate that one woman is no better than another, in fact, no different. Outward appearance only indicates second-order differences, differences that are mere camouflages. Pornography sets out to rid woman of all trappings, uncover her of all accumulated 'superficial' signifieds and reveal her 'true' self, her 'real' nature, pare her down to bare essentials. Woman is forever stamped with the sign of the eternal whore, a sign that is not changeable or adaptable but is always self-equivalent, a signal, as it were. She is thus transformed into a being without bearings, into a subject sans subjectivity. The proponents of sexual libertarianism may argue that to enter the world of pornography, then, is to regress into the *primaeval* horde—in that hallowed space, all difference is erased, each moment merges with the mythic moment of origin. In other words, according to them, pornography assures the hedonistic delights of disrememberance of things past, present and future and invites all to desire in the elemental whore, the lineaments of never-to-be gratified desire. However, contrary to the liberal claims, pornography does not allow an unconditional disremembering; instead it continually invokes the

of discourse. And thus women is exhibited as a spectacle, as someone who is always willing to be probed and inspected by the all-knowing phallic vision. Pornography to the last remains implicated in and by the official discourse and functions as its alter. Pornography is the favoured domain of forbidden speech, precisely because it formalizes and ritualizes both speech and sexuality. In the name of libidinal celebration and reckless ribaldry the ritual maintains the moral order.

The intimacy between lust and language is well-illustrated by the following story : Prabir has no complaints about his wife Rita except on one ground. Rita is highly educated, sings Rabindra-sangeet, comes from a respected family, is very well-behaved, dutiful to the elders and religious. But she never uses foul language during copulation. Prabir patiently explains to her that dirty words add spice to the sexual act. But Rita remains unmoved. One day, exasperated at her adamant attitude, Prabir bursts out into a torrent of obscene words. Rita, shocked at her husband's behaviour refuses to have sex with him. Maddened by this show of defiance, Prabir contemplates various ways of punishing and torturing her. In desperation he tries to seduce the maid-servant of the house, Basan. Though deserted by her husband, Basan dutifully puts on the vermilion mark. At first she resists Prabir's overtures but finally gives in, and to Prabir's utter satisfaction, she is not wary of using foul language. Prabir finds in her an ideal partner; contrasting Basan to his wife, he feels that though educated Rita is basically ignorant— she has not learnt to obey the dictates of her husband. Basan sympathizes with Prabir and says that she hates Rita for her indifference towards her husband. She believes that God will one day punish Rita for forsaking her husband, as that contradicts the scheme of things laid down by Him. Basan minces no words in saying that husband to wife is God.

Though pornography professes to project all women as whores, it cannot but introduce new markers of difference : the 'bad' 'bad-woman' (Rita) as against the 'good' 'bad-woman' (Basan). And these characterizations establish link, no matter how tenuously, between pornography and other hegemonic forms of representation. In the story, Rita's refusal to engage in a 'free exchange of foul language becomes so threatening to Prabir, because it also indicates a defiance of the codes that posit women as mere commodities of exchange. That coercion and consent are co-terminus, the two together giving shape to relations of dominance is made amply clear by Prabir's anger. To generalize, since woman live under the tutelage of men within a limited space, 'from earliest childhood woman is taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. ... So she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.... The surveyor of woman in herself is male : the surveyed female." ⁸ Thus a part of the woman is co-opted into the man : there exists a domain in the woman's

regions where the grid is tightest, where the black squares are most numerous?'⁶ Does it keep its promise of textasy — an ecstatic loss of the subject in a sexual textual coming⁷ — and herald an 'immoral economy' as opposed to the 'moral economy' of the *bhadraloks*? Or is there a secret connection, a kind of symbiosis between the two economies; despite the obvious differences, is the 'immoral economy' actually predicated on the moral one? As a way of clarification, let us return to the question of woman's body, the proper site of pornographic language.

Woman's body can be felt and filled up, but at the same time, it is a limitless void, a never- to-be-filled-to-the-brim repository of all that issues forth from men — semen, urine or speech: the body is scarred by the double-bond of 'presence' and 'absence'. The modes of address, invoked in pornography, not only situate woman but also indicate her inferiority. It is immaterial whether a man is placed at a lower station than a woman, for, in most cases, during the sexual act the man uses the pronoun *tui* while the woman reciprocates by addressing him as *tumi*. The meeting of bodies does not establish a relation of equity, but simply, as far as the woman is concerned, upsets all other hierarchies and inequalities to foreground and focalize gender-asymmetry. The ultimate point of culmination of a text or an episode within the text is invariably the male ejaculation. The very rhythm and logic of episodes is attuned to the demands of male physiology: the masculine perspective is highlighted by excluding other possibilities. The language used by men during copulation is remarkable for its violence; it is the language of rape and quite in keeping with the premises of pornography women reciprocate by echoing the same sentiments. The language signals the fact that a sexual relation between a man and a woman is essentially an encounter between a sadist and a masochist. Since most of the abusive words are sexist, heavily weighted against women, any attempt on her part to use these words in retaliation becomes self-defeating. Woman, in pornography, is shown to take part in the exchange of these words rather spontaneously, and thereby she is implicated in her own condemnation. Prostitutes do not figure prominently in contemporary Bengali pornography — since women are essentially whores and prime seducers, a special category of prostitutes become redundant — and the texts incessantly reiterate the point that dominance is natural and intrinsic to the sexual act, a necessary component of the pleasure principle. As if being battered and raped are, for woman, the pre-conditions for deriving sexual pleasure, and this 'love of pain', which is said to be coded and embedded in her very being, is used as a physiological justification of dominance by men. For all its transgressive gestures, pornography does NOT allow any libidinal play to unhinge the sexually pre-fixed signifieds and put meaning in abeyance; instead, it continually hails the phallus as THE "transcendental signified, the signified that has absolute authority over its field

in, say, the Higher Secondary Examination, are often used — the significance of their position in the public sphere is always underlined. But it is still consoling for the average reader that notwithstanding the differences in their ranks in the public sphere, it is possible to emulate the heroes in the private one. As an exception, the names of popular actresses are mentioned in some texts. But since they are actresses, they are pre-judged and condemned. The portrayal of incestuous relations has a dual purpose : on the one hand such portrayals assure the male reader of easy availability of women-flesh, and on the other serves as a warning that to retain his foot-hold in the private sphere, he must keep a constant watch over women-folk. In quite a few texts, the narrative is punctuated by authorial intrusions; and the authorial voice in these cases is nothing but the unmasked phallic voice, the voice that expresses concern at the rise of women's movements in the country treating them as deeply disturbing symptoms of encroaching alien Western values and rather cynically lays the blame of vitiating the atmosphere squarely on the crusaders of women's rights. To contain the growing menace of lasciviousness, the authorial voice counsels the readers not to allow their women-folk to meet men, no matter whom, and to keep them as confined as possible. It is stressed that a woman, no matter how she is related to a man, will inevitably be driven by her insatiable appetite to violate social codes; her basic whorist propensity and wantonness is a constant threat to the intricate matrix of social relations that hold the world in place. Pornography defamiliarizes the familial interpellation only to re-locate the woman within the space of family and underscore patriarchal authority.

THE WORLD OF MEN

How do men relate to each other in pornography ? Let us take two examples, both dealing with the two men - one woman triangle. The first : Ashok's father is an owner of a colliery at Dhanbad. Ashok comes to Calcutta to study in a college situated on Park Street. He rents a flat for himself and strikes up a friendship with a rich Bengali Muslim, Yusuf, his fellow collegestudent. One day, while drinking in Ashok's flat, Yusuf says that though he has had sexual relations with several women, he is yet to see the likes of a woman named Minati. He had met her just the other day. In casual conversation with Minati, Yusuf had discovered that she has a deeprooted odium for Muslims. Always pragmatic, Yusuf had introduced himself as a Hindu. The friends decide to give a call to Minati and she does not hesitate to respond. Modish in appearance and style, she looks very inviting. Ashok immediately makes up his mind to reserve her exclusively for his use that night. He manages to get Yusuf drunk and then finding Minati a willing partner, engages in explicit sexual acts. After several bouts Ashok decides to betray the trust reposed on him by Yusuf. He tells Minati that Yusuf is a Muslim and gives her the obvious proof of the fact. Minati

psyche which is subsumed with the values that uphold and justify man's dominance. Pornography focusses on the interiorized male aspect of woman's psychology and by a sleight of synecdoche, presents that part as the whole. Pornography, then, adopts a double-movement towards the representation of woman : first, it posits her as the 'other', defined by difference and then immediately establishes a kind of identity, transforming her to himself, reducing the otherness to sameness. One can logically expect such solipsism in any discourse that hails the phallus as the transcendental signified, but as pornography begins by ironing out all difference between women, it stands out. This leads to the curious paradox of heterosexual pornography : the texts are surcharged with a sublimated form of homoeroticism ; at one level, the man seeks and sees in the woman his own mirror image. Pornography not only homogenizes women, it also annihilates her completely : she is neither subject nor object. The situation remains unaltered by switching the narrative voice from men to women; for precisely this is the point : in pornography women are not empowered to speak; the phallic voice is the only voice that resounds in pornotopia,

FAMILY DE-FAMILIARIZED

The bulk of Bengali pornography has plots revolving round incestuous relations. Sexual libertarians may feel overjoyed to see such gross transgression of familial taboos, subversion of relations long sanctified by patriarchal tradition. They may argue : since in our kind of society patriarchal authority is best perpetuated through the institution of family, by undermining familial ideology pornography finally attacks the very foundation of patriarchy. Moreover, since men too unabashedly indulge in incestuous exploits, it may be claimed, at least on this score that pornography is impartial to both the sexes. But this line of argument cannot really be sustained.

Women, in the constructed as well as in the real world have only the private sphere to speak for themselves. To show woman as shorn of familial coordinates WITHOUT disturbing the strict, water-tight compartmentalization of private and public spheres is to reach the heights of patriarchal fantasy. Whenever a woman is shown to violate any social code or norm, she is reduced to a non-entity, but a similar action on the part of men does not endanger his image or identity in the public sphere, for there his identity is not defined in relation to women, the public sphere is monosex. The dissolving of familial bonds has more serious implications for women than men. These texts of incest are vested with a will to power, a will to consolidate total control over both the spheres, to weed out all possible resistance and obstruction.

In quite a few pornographic texts, the male protagonists happen to be real characters of outstanding capabilities, names of students who have fared well

around two axes : vertical for men and horizontal for women. Any term from the horizontal axis can be picked to illustrate the hierarchical arrangement of the vertical axis : the degree of control that men have over women becomes an index of their rank in the order of things, for women, mere commodities of exchange and signs of equivalence, have no other option but to become the property of the more powerful. It is through the possession of her body that power proclaims itself. Pornography is a spectacle without characters — characters that either develop or devolve — there are only actors who play out the dictates of order. They perform only to give form to the immanent laws, their bodies meeting only to embody power. The most-repeated epithet for woman, as is to be expected, is '*mal*' , 'a thing'. and the man too is just a datum, a pointer. In pornography, gender-interpellation is not only primary and irreducible, it is also a fixed point of reference for the others : it both invokes and acts as a symbol of the other interpellations, thereby producing a relatively unified discourse that narrates and corroborates the official view of the middle-class Bengali, Hindu heterosexual man. The rest are marginalized in varying degrees. Pornography classifies all, and the classification conceals as well as reveals a particular set of class-assumptions.

The consumer of pornography is a voyeur who knows that it is all there but also never there, whose fulfilment is always deferred, who has to come back again and again. Since pornography is organized around the principle of vicarious gratification, it titillates by tantalizing and tantalizes by titillating. It renders service to the status quo by sexual manipulation, the formula for manipulation being : always tease, never appease. Sexuality too is a site of ideology and the 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle' are not separable domains. By splitting the two one inevitably ends up by echoing the pornographic message : reality is 'pleasant' and pleasure 'real'. Just as pornography invites policing it is itself a policing agency. And what is more, pornography is not all that special either, it is not a privileged order of representation; 'it shares many of its modes of address, many of its codes and conventions with representations that are not looked as 'pornographic'. ' Once we realize this we may wake up to the reality : We are all citizens of pornotopia.*

This analysis is based on a sample of about one hundred texts.

NOTES

- 1 Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', *Mythologies*, London, 1972, p.142
- 2 Gary Kinsman, 'The Porn Debate', *Fuse* Summer 1984, vol III, nos. 1&2, p.41
- 3 Annette Kuhn, 'Lawless seeing', *The Power of the Image*, London, 1985, p.22
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 200
- 5 Maud Ellman, 'Disremembering Dedalus', *Untying the Text* ed. Robert Young, London, 1987, p. 191

is disgusted at Yusuf and Ashok feels secured in having eliminated a potential rival.

In the story, Ashok literally reduces Yusuf to a state of complete passivity by getting him drunk. But he hits upon a permanent solution by exploiting Minati's sentiments regarding Muslims. The story is obviously gratifying to the diehard Hindu reader, as the claims of Hindu superiority is mapped and corroborated by Ashok's sexual victory. The reader may thank him for having saved Minati from the vile clutches of a Muslim. To use Greimas' terms, the male 'opponent' remains an opponent to the last. The strategy employed in the two men - one woman case is the exact obverse of the one man - two women case: while the differences between women in relation to the man are annulled in the former, the differences between men in relation to the woman is accentuated in the latter. But what is the measure of this difference? Let us examine another text.

Madan has all the advantages of life: he is rich and handsome. In contrast, Sanat, a friend of Madan, is poor and rather ordinary in looks. Sanat is amazed at the frequency in which Madan changes his girl-friends. Amused at his curiosity, Madan one day takes Sanat to a posh hotel and introduces him to Mina, a rich, good-looking, non-Bengali woman. Madan had a permanent suite in the hotel and he takes them there. Quite oblivious of Sanat's presence, Madan and Mina undress and start fornicating. Sanat feels humiliated; the sense of torture that he undergoes increases with the rise in their frenzy. Unable to restrain himself, after a certain point, he suddenly intervenes and though neither fair or good-looking nor conversant in English as Madan, Sanat scores upon one point: his genital is larger in size than that of Madan. Mina, impressed by the size turns to Sanat, ignoring Madan. The table is turned on Madan now, and feeling left out a rage builds up in him. When Mina asks him not to touch her, Madan retaliates: disengaging Sanat from her he starts thrashing Mina for her audacity and commands her to get down on her knees. Like an "obedient bitch", Mina does what she is bidden to do, and only after he had his fill for the day does Madan magnanimously grant permission to Sanat to carry on with Mina.

At one stage in the story, Mina is sandwiched between Sanat and Madan, literally reduced to the state of a hyphen between the men who really matter. Her presence is a mere mechanism to bring out in a sharper focus the difference in their social status. At one point, Madan loses his grip over the situation; defeated because of the size of his genital — the male genital, the repository of all masculine values — Madan undergoes a tremendous pressure akin to the castration complex. However he retrieves the situation by unleashing his rage on Mina and is able to put Sanat back to his place. Mina undergoes violence by proxy: the target is actually Sanat.

Pornography, clearly ~~reduces~~ men and women and distributes them

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE FROM BELOW

Amiya Dev

Pardon me my fancy title, but I would like to propose a new orientation to comparative literature. This is not a matter of school or scope—of what we must mean by comparative literature and must do by it—but merely of orientation. Of course to think in terms of 'from below' and 'from above' is to think dialectically, but how can we avoid thinking dialectically in human sciences? For human sciences themselves are no less products of history than their objects of study. If at any time a human science grows oppressive then history asks for its refurbishment. And since comparative literature is a movement and we are a kind of constant underground trying to revolutionize literary studies everywhere, we have a special charge in activating this dialectic. It is here that I am doing my bit. I am raising a question about the place of methodology in comparative literature.

In an essay in the early seventies the German comparatist Erwin Koppen argued that comparative literature could not claim the status of a literary theory but only of a literary method. I remember that in printing a translation of that essay as part of a book brought out by us at Jadavpur by arrangement with Horst Erdmann Verlag of Tübingen and Basle,* I was quite swayed by it and used it as a constant reference in my lectures. And surely Koppen was not alone in this persuasion, he had company. Many comparatists believed, and some still do, in the primacy of the method. The idea was that it was something given, that we had to follow it when we did a literary study of the comparative nature, that a violation of it was a contradiction in terms. In other words, its priority was or is still taken for granted. In order to be trained a comparatist one has to primarily master the method. At least that is what some of us were taught and that is what some of us have been teaching. I would like to begin with a deconstruction of this notion of method.

We all know that the word 'method' is eventually derived from the Greek 'methodos' which again is derived from 'meta' meaning 'after' and 'hodos' meaning 'way'. If method is moving after a way, then it must have been arrived at after moving wayward for some time. That is, a literary method must have been arrived at after an amount of impressionistic criticism. We must not be waylaid here by that classic puzzle of which first, the seed or the fruit, for all intellectual history tells us that methods arise only after we have been exposed to the phenomena themselves for a while. Bharata's *Natyasastra* was probably post-Bhasa and of course Aristotle's *Poetics* was posterior to the height of Attic drama. No method comes out of an empty laboratory; its making must be fed

- 6 Michel Foucault, 'Order of Discourse, *ibid.*, p. 52
- 7 Robert Young, 'Introduction to Roland Barthe's "Theory of the Text"', *ibid.*, p.
32
- 8 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, 1974, pp.46-47
- 9 Annette Kuhn, 'Lawless seeing,' *The Power of the Image*, London, p.106 1985.

without a local habitation and name, and literature with a capital L is only an idea or a logical construct, there can be no doubt as to what motivates him. Even when he moves over to literary theory he cannot be very far from his literatures, for his examples are all from there. It may also be argued that his theory is only an abstraction from those concretes. Obviously with literary history the distance is further lessened.

It is this primacy of national literatures that I would stress in comparative literature. The methodology comes after. Besides it is never fixed, never fully predicted. In fact, it is largely determined by the data themselves. For instance if we are dealing with a case of the so-called first world-third world literary relations, the register of the interliterariness within the first or the second world or of the first-second world may not at all do. We may have to think of an altogether fresh register. If we stick to the old register we may have a partial or even a faulty understanding of the event. We may go on influence hunting of the X on Y kind where a much complex case of reception might have been involved. Besides, if the interliterariness is not referred to the historical background of the nations it is bound to be one-dimensional, particularly in instances where political domination of the one by the other existed. Anyway, I should not belabour the obvious, for if the data vary and vary substantially, how can we approach them with our old pickaxe and pincers? The universalist argument does not hold where the variability rate is so high. Then again, who decide the universals? Can they be uninfluenced by their own specifics? A methodology biased comparative literature is thus bound to be a discipline from above.

I am not saying that we should blast methodology. I am only saying that we should recreate methodology every time we have fresh data. And every time we do have fresh data—it is simply a question of recognizing them. If history were hundred percent a structure, then history would be all predictable. But history always gives us some surprise. That is also a reason why studying history is so fascinating. If comparative literature is methodology dominated then all comparative literature would be the same, the variety being mere variations. Then it would not matter where we do it, whether here or elsewhere, with what data and whether we have a commitment to particular national literatures. But we are not scientists galore and have not made the laboratory our home. We are products of history and are ourselves producing history. We speak a language and maybe one or two more, and we certainly have a commitment to particular national literatures. And we have turned to comparative literature because of the bulk of our commitment. It is the right science for us. So, if in sifting our data we only work out structures that look like other structures worked out by other comparatists, then we would be betraying ourselves. However dramatic it may sound, comparative literature

comparative literature has evolved? If we think of early exercise, the data were French plus, that is, taken from French and some other European literature or literatures. And when finally a full-fledged methodology was devised, its French reference was not to be missed. Did those pioneers who did this devising have any inkling that someday this methodology would be adopted in Asia and Africa as well? But Asia and Africa's employment of this methodology lock stock and barrel is an indirect admission of its absolute authority. Thus a method is prone to be invested with an invisible power. And under the aegis of that power we may be engaged in fitting the data to the method, stretching them or cutting them down to size, without knowing that we are doing violence to the data. And who would dare question the method that has been consecrated by generations of pioneers, near founders and founders of the discipline? This is what I would call the politics of methodology. Whether or not Etiemble was aware of it, his '*comparaison n'est pas raison*' was a political act; and so was Wellek's '*Crisis of Comparative Literature*' notwithstanding his aversion to mixing literature and politics. But both Etiemble and Wellek were looking forward, in their own ways of course, to a parallel methodology and in spite of their eclecticism—Etiemble's perhaps of a greater degree than Wellek's judging by Etiemble's plenary speech at the XIth ICLA in Paris—they hailed a prior principle of order to which the data were to be made over. Wittingly or unwittingly they were legitimizing method and were asking us to bring the data to the method and not the method to the data. So they too were subject to the politics of methodology in spite of their initial revolutionary role. Even the most exhaustive approach to comparative literature today, Dürisün's literary comparatistics, is more methodology than data oriented.

Of course all definition is methodology minded. But there is a question of commitment here that needs to be settled first. As comparatists are we committed to a given methodology or to the national literatures of our involvement? Or being comparatists do we not respond to the national literatures as immediately as the national literature scholars? We all must have felt, sometime or other in our career, a certain hesitation as to the extent of our competence to deal with national literatures. And yet it will be absurd to say that we are not literary critics like our colleagues, that comparison is not criticism, that their task is one and ours quite another. This wall between the comparatist and the national literature scholar is in reality quite thin—either can shift roles when necessary. What I am saying is that there is an incipient other in both. If that is granted, then there should be no problem regarding the comparatist's primary commitment. It has to be to the national literatures of his concern. For it is in order to understand them further that he has embarked upon comparison. In other words, he is doing comparison not because he is a comparatist but because he is a literary critic. And since there is no literature

by interliterariness. Professor Tan Chung of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi has been giving us instances of classical Indian material being metamorphosed into imperial Chinese material or of imperial Chinese narration being traceable to the classical Indian with such continuity and span that it may not be wrong to think in some kind of trans-Himalayan terms. Similarly if we reopen the issue of the migration of the tale from India via Persia and Arabia to Europe, suggested so persuasively by Max Müller in the last century, and look up the data again, sift them with our advanced narratology, linguistics and socio-anthropology today, and of course without violating the truths of cultural relativism, then may we have a complementary perspective. I say we may, for we must not be swayed by any preconceptions at all. And at the same time we must reopen those other two questions, the extent of Indian literary contacts with classical Greece in the wake of Alexander's invasion and after, and the nature of the Persian-Arabic impact on Indian literatures as reflected in residues. This latter should engage us in a comprehensive way by probing the languages and the arts as well as culture in general. And it may not be out of place to take stock once again of whatever literary and paraliterary export we made at one time or another to other South Asian and to East Asian countries and whatever minor literary and paraliterary import we have had on our various seaboards. In other words, our interliterariness with regard to other nations or countries should be studied as exhaustively as possible, not simply in its most dramatic manifestation, the Indian-Western, which we have been probing for some time now. And here too we still have room for data processing. That is, instead of clamping a structure on whatever data are already processed and making inferences in accordance with a given model, however reputed, we should go on gathering facts and piling up history. That does not mean that we should altogether give up our ideology. But ideology must not rationalize history and put stoppers all around. On the contrary, ideology must whet our thirst for history; and if ideology ever comes into conflict with history, then it is ideology that must go, not history.

I suppose the time has come for comparative literature to redefine its relation to literary history. Its relation to literary theory is pretty well defined, and as long as it remains so there should not be any problems. But what kind of literary history does comparative literature approximate? It cannot be the mere inorganic piling of chronos. Nor can it be the perfect biology of birth, growth and decay. It can only be a continuous dialogic of the unpredictable and the predictable, the most comprehensive discourse of the literary events, but a discourse all right, for no history is self-immanent. But if a discourse is primarily concerned with its own grammar self-reflexiveness being its prime rationale for existence, if a discourse only looks for ready structures, then that discourse may not do. Instead of such a closed discourse we need an open one.

Comparative literature from above would not let us be party to the notion of Comparative Indian Literature that has developed in this country to deal with its multiliterariness. Instead of straitjacketing the various literatures of India into one Indian literature, Comparative Indian Literature recognizes them all as Indian literatures, plural. In fact it may not be altogether wrong to think of them all as national literatures, but they are not national literatures as independent expressions of various nations living within the same geophysical area, but national literatures as full manifestations of various language groups and cultural diversities contributing to the same nation. It is the interrelations of these literatures, a necessary outcome of their history, that Comparative Indian Literature tries to study. As I have said elsewhere, it does not let any one literature go megalomaniac and look for its parallels in the others. As it does not let any one literature stand all by itself but be thought of along with the others, it does not let any one literature dominate the others in the matter of literary categories. If one literature developed a new style at one time, it does not mean that all the others developed that same style at the same time or to the same degree. Yet it may be that almost all the literatures at one time or another and to various degrees did develop that new style or theme or attitude to literature. And we arrive at that by not beginning with one and asking for its reflections everywhere else but by beginning with groups of two or more and by continuously collating them. This process may not be neat but it is thorough and yields authentic results. It does not induce any closures and flatten out complexities. Fully cognizant of the history it knows that some Indian literatures are also literatures in other nations—it is aware, in other words, of the problematic of the language-literature identification. What is more, it does not try to rationalize that with any given notions. Structure is not its only programme.

I am not saying that comparative literature from below is a kind of critical bonanza, that anything and everything is within its scope. I am saying that it is respectful to the literatures themselves and if anything demands attention there, anything at all, unforeseen, unprecedented, that is heeded. In other words I am saying, and maybe a trifle passionately, that the spectre of precedence should be exorcised. If the literatures ask for a certain probe, we shall not look back and see whether we have any precedents for such a probe; we will go ahead and make the probe. But we shall not thereby turn this into a precedent and expect similar probes from similar groupings of literatures. Pardon again the passion, but neither shall we be coerced nor shall we ourselves coerce. Let method be only a function. Let us have our prime faith in the literatures.

If two national literatures, for instance, enjoy proximity and have a history of interaction, whether continuous or interrupted, then in order to understand, even to retrieve, ~~some aspects~~ of the one we may do well to refer to the other. And this may go beyond the scope of what we ordinarily mean

And an open discourse is that which does not hanker for ready structures and can go on adjusting itself to the changing perceptions. An open discourse is that which never says the last word. An open discourse can afford to be inconclusive, for its prime concern is not how it itself shapes, but how it comes to terms with perceptions, how it registers them all. An open discourse is inclusive, a closed discourse exclusive. And it is because of the domination of the closed discourse in society that we have an intellectual crisis every now and then. In such crises an open discourse can come to our rescue. But the dialectic of the closed and the open is so acute and the will to power is so strong that the open is often manipulated into turning closed. The answer to that is a kind of perpetual revolution. And it is this revolution that comparative literature from below is part of.

Being revolutionary in spirit comparative literature from below has a great responsibility. Not only does it have to initiate an open discourse, and for that make a constant critique of the closed one, but it has also to put out all possible signs of fixity and stratification in its own fold. That is, it has to be absolutely ambidextrous, its one hand constantly making way and the other constantly pruning itself. Comparative literature from above being methodology heavy has an easier task, to execute the dictates of a methodology. The national literatures do not pose any problem to it. But for comparative literature from below the national literatures are a constant challenge—or maybe challenge is not the right word, a surprise. They are constantly to be reckoned with. Comparative literature from below has ever to keep awake, be ever vigilant—it cannot afford to let any literary event pass by. It represents the living conscience of the literary critic, never ever to sag. Taut like a bowstring it also represents the living conscience of the reader to which all literary texts are holy.

Pardon me this polemic, but Comparative Literature from below is the only orientation that can save Comparative Literature from turning into a power and steer it towards a true understanding of national literatures. Comparative Literature from below is the Comparative Literature of tomorrow.

**Contribution to Comparative Literature : Germany and India*, edited by Naresh Guha (Calcutta : Jadavpur University, by arrangement with Horst Erdmann Verlag, Tübingen 1973).